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SATCHEL SERIES. No. 11

Our Peggotties.

To all Women who Appreciate the
Situation.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

OUR PEGGOTTIES

BY

KESIAH SHELTON



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P R E F I X.

"OUT of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh" is verified by the writing of this book. Until I had relieved my mind of the accumulation of disagreeabilities impressed upon it by my faithful and unfaithful "Peggotties" it was impossible for me to write of aught else; and, rather than have one of the unkempt, saucy beings intruding herself into my scenic descriptions or philosophical debates, I have, like "Peggotty" the Sixth, "made a piece" that it is to be hoped will relieve my surcharged brain somewhat, and I trust now to be able to dip my pen in ink and have it run off the point in the vein I desire without constantly digressing from the subject to that of the deposed and disposed-of "Peggotties." Were it not that I place such confidence in the whole-souledness and magnanimity of the original "Peggotty" I should fear lest I might have a nocturnal visit from her ghostship to demand satisfaction for the insult to her memory.

But I have dubbed my hand-maidens the name they *should* have deserved, but did *not*.

With this prefix I consign this book of woe to the unkind critics and kind readers with only a Yankee apology for its short-comings. How could a half-distracted and Peggottied-to-death woman do any better? I couldn't. Could you? If so, please do, and *he* and *I* will read it, and send a copy to—"Peggotty."

Resignedly thine,

KESIAH SHELTON.

DEDICATED

TO ALL WOMANKIND THAT CAN APPRECIATE

THE SITUATION.

OUR PEGGOTTIES.

CHAPTER I.

A SHORT-LIVED DREAM OF INDEPENDENCE.

“TRUTH is stranger than fiction,” and upon the horizon of my life had suddenly appeared “a cloud somewhat resembling the appearance of a man’s hand,” that threatened to demolish my dream of contented old maidism, and I had meekly bowed acquiescence to my apparent fate ; therefore I, heretofore considered by *all*, the predestined old maid of the family, was serenely preparing my bridal trousseau, and anticipating the happiness of presiding over the welfare of a certain youth, and his cozy “story and a half” cottage that crowned the summit of a lofty hill which proudly overlooked a neighboring village. With the hereditary instinct of a New Englander, it was to be my pleasure to do this unaided, although delicate in health. My own inclination led me to easily believe it would be “just nothing, only two of you,” as all my friends suggested.

The instability and unreliability of help, was per-

sistently pointed out to me by all my friends who were housekeepers, and I willingly believed them, and looked forward in full confidence to perfect success in my effort to be wholly independent, and therefore happy.

The cottage was neatly and tastefully furnished, each room proudly displaying its pretty if not expensive carpet, for *I* did not intend “to do” my work so carelessly as to find it a disadvantage to have even my kitchen carpeted.

With what feelings of exultation did I enter upon even the most menial duties! For was it not my very own? Did I not hourly realize that my new furniture was not being robbed of its pristine freshness by the vandal hands of reckless servants? My silver could now be freely used without the fear that it might be utterly ruined, lost or stolen each week. The food was properly cooked and well served on glossy, white, uncracked, and ungrazed dishes. When the “dinner things” were washed, and the dining-room brushed up, I could take a book or my work into the sunny parlor, and leave my care behind me in the kitchen realms to be taken up again at the proper time; or, better even than *that*, could have “my afternoon out” without asking Bridget’s permission! For it is to *that* we have come as a nation —the servants *rule*.

A friend gave me her experience at an (non) “intelligence office.” A girl was led forward for her inspection and criticism; the smirking clerk, with an obsequious

bow to the lady, presented Biddy with, "She's well recommended, ma'am, by some of the first families." Before my friend could finish her first inquiry, the girl, as if not hearing, asked *her* "how large a family have ye, mum?" "Three," replied my friend, and again essayed an attempt to ascertain the girl's qualifications, but failed as before. "Have ye set-bilers, and are all your rooms carpeted?" Being answered, she next queried, "Can I have a well furnished room all to myself? and how many afternoons out do you usually expect the gurrl to let ye have, mum?"

Before my friend could rally from her astonishment, the "gurrl" dropped an impudent curtsy, saying, "I don't think ye'll suit me at all, mum!"

I, by my bravery, was to escape the chains of slavery that servantdom had riveted around the fair white throats of my friends as firmly as the silver collar of ancient serfdom or the fool's necklace of tinkling bells. Liberty forever!

Sitting in my parlor of an afternoon I could glance contentedly around at the fresh carpet that could now be used all we wished, without fear that the frequent sweepings might ruin it, at the shelves and brackets, freely adorned with bric-à-brac too precious for constant exhibition, if one had servants, and then on into the sitting-room, from thence to the dining-room, and yes, still further, to the kitchen beyond—one pleasant, uninterrupted view—all neat and bright. No necessity

for closed doors here ; the guest that had an unobstructed view from parlor to kitchen, would see naught to offend the eye. And had I not cause to be thankful that I was competent to do this, and did not feel it necessary to keep a cook and chambermaid to produce chaos from order, when I could do the whole and leave my afternoons undisturbed, except to "get tea" for us two ?

All things have an end, and so did my dream of home comfort, else I had had no story to tell. Even with my frail health it was long ere I found my work hard at all, for interest in one's work makes the hands skillful, and saves many weary steps.

Yet, as the years passed on, it was gradually impressed upon my unwilling mind that I was more than delicate—that confirmed invalidism confronted my future.

How could I endure it ?

What should we do—give up our home, and board ? That seemed the most reasonable to me *then*, and I think so *yet*, but *he*, of course, after the reasoning of the mind of *man*, could not "see" how we could board and relinquish the comforts of a home. We must have help and get along the best way we could. But I knew that if the wheels of household machinery would not run smoothly, when guided by servants under the personal supervision of a careful housewife, they certainly would not, when left as much to themselves as I should be forced to leave them. But *he* thought we should do nicely !

We could do nothing, however, we thought, with the

ordinary class of help, and all our friends concurred in our opinion, and said "you ought to have some one capable of taking charge of the work—a nice American woman that you can treat like one of the family"—in point of fact, a combination of friend and servant—one that would care for me in my frequent ill turns, and take an interest in the work and my comfort—a second "Peggotty."

As we can not have what we like,
Let us like what we can have.

NEW VERSION OF AN OLD PROVERB.

CHAPTER II.

PEGGOTTY THE FIRST.

MANY weary weeks passed ere the perfect flower was found ; yet at last in a stray farm house was discovered an ancient maiden lady, that, at the early age of fifty-five, had recently been left a motherless orphan, and her friends advised her being taken by some "good" family where her assistance for a slight consideration would be acceptable. All agreed she was *just* the person we needed ; so this flower that had apparently been left by fate or unappreciating man, to waste her desert sweetness (that is not a mistake) on the air, was transplanted to *our* household, where her sweetness was expected to satisfy us even to satiety, and we in turn were to show

our appreciation of the maiden, by making her welcome to our hearts and home.

It was on a bright sunshiny day, when the sky was a bonny blue, the air as mild as June, and the rapidly greening grass was promising us the sweets of budding spring and blossoming summer, that a neighboring farm wagon rattled up to our gate and therefrom alighted an angular, sour-visaged maiden, or, in other words, the anxiously-expected "Peggotty."

I relinquished my work and hastened to the door to welcome her (do not laugh—please remember she was not a *servant*, but—"Peggotty") with the utmost graciousness, mingled with, as I intended, a slight amount of dignity, to satisfy my consciousness that I should still direct the helm.

Her countenance struck me as a study for an artist. That expression of injured feelings must have been worn from childhood and have become chronic, methought, to have reached such a state of perfection. Her manner of returning my overtures at an acquaintance was that of one whom the whole world had conspired to injure, but who was firmly determined to bear it.

Finding ordinary conversation a failure, I turned it upon her expected duties. She did "not like to cook," but would do anything else, and was very moderate in her demands for compensation, as a *home* was her object rather than an income.

Soon it was nearly tea time, and I went to the dining-

room to initiate her into her new duties, and soon saw that the maiden would not be a very apt pupil. At last tea was ready. I thought "she is not much help to-night, at least," but clung to the faith that this once would be sufficient upon my part; next time she could do it alone.

When *he* came I introduced "Peggotty," and the new trinity—he, I and "Peggotty"—sat down to the evening repast. A feeling of inexpressible sadness oppressed me throughout the meal. It was a tempting spread, but I could not eat. I did not understand it then. I do now. It was the funeral feast over our dead and gone (never, never to return) home joys and comforts. When "Peggotty" came in the spirit of household happiness floated out.

After I showed "Peggotty" where to find the conveniences for "doing up" the tea things, and *he* and I had retired to the sitting-room, leaving the door open, of course, for I was quick-witted enough to see that closing the door would be received as "treated like a servant," and so bravely renounced all future tête-à-têtes with *him* or any one else, because now there would always be the question of "Peggotty's" feelings to be considered.

As we sat before the glowing anthracite fire in the wide-mouthed grate that was throwing out its pleasant heat this chilly spring evening, *he* was contentedly basking in the pleasant fire-light, and in a low tone of voice congratulating himself on his superior judgment in deciding to "keep house" rather than endure the discom-

forts of boarding, and blessing his luck in securing such a worthy person, that would assure to us our accustomed comforts free from the alloy, sure to be supplied by "servants ;" as he was thus taking warm comfort in his self-satisfaction at the very palpable superiority of his plan, over that of his weaker half, my attention was distracted from his conversation to the sour looks of dissatisfaction that were darted from those glittering grey eyes through the open door at us, as "Peggotty" passed back and forth, from the dining-room to the kitchen, intent upon her clearing-up "duties." These looks said as plainly as words to me, "why don't you come and 'wipe' the dishes? (a true New Englander never 'dries' but always 'wipes' the dish); I am as good as you are; I did not come here as a *servant*."

"Ah," thought I, "it will be wisdom for me to profess blindness, as regards many things. But the leaven of suspicion on the 'equal rights' question is working." I hinted as much to *him* : "What nonsense. Of course she expects to do the work. She was hired for that. She only stipulated that she should be treated like one of the family. The work she knows she must do."

I was not so sure of it by the spiteful movements that I could hear now and then from the vicinity of the kitchen.

Soon her duties were disposed of, and with a look of dissatisfaction that did not improve her not-otherwise attractive countenance, she returned to the sitting-room,

and ensconcing herself in a low rocker proceeded to make herself agreeable, by looking as unhappy as possible, and returning our attempts at conversing with her by mono-syllabic replies.

The only voluntary remark that she made was when, upon observing my employment—that of tying worsted for lamp-mats—she jerked out, “Then you are able to do fancy work ; I didn’t know as you done *anything*,” with the most perfect sneer imaginable.

“Oh, yes, such work is light and easy, and takes my attention from myself somewhat,” I pleasantly replied.

“ ’Tisn’t everybody that can afford to waste their time simply to amuse themselves,” snapped she.

“Ah, just as I thought, jealousy is paramount there,” said I to myself.

She soon signified that she always went to “bed early,” and after giving her directions for our simple breakfast, and telling her the breakfast hour, I piloted her to the chamber that I had set apart for the future use of my hand-maidens of which I was about to introduce to its hitherto peaceful precincts No. 1.

True to my principle of treating them like one of the family, the little room was furnished with a tasteful chamber set—bright carpet, snowy curtains at the windows, prettily tinted paper on the walls—and, as I set the lamp down on the bureau, whose drawers were all freshly lined with paper, and at her full disposal, and threw open a door giving a view of a neat clothes closet, with

its double row of hooks, and broad shelves also for her sole use and behoof thereof, I bade her good night, thinking that she never had so good a home before, and might well be thankful that she could obtain one, hampered only by the light duties of our household.

The following morning dawned as sweetly as though this world was all brightness. *He* arose and, as was his custom, built the fires, filled the tea-kettle, and I heard him go out upon the piazza whistling cheerily. The sound was pleasantly borne to my drowsy ears, mingled with the sweet, hopeful song of the bluebirds, and half-sleeping, half-waking, that most delicious of conditions, I dreamily thought, "having help of this style will not relieve *him* of any of his duties, but *I* can rest mornings." Full of this unselfish sentiment, I dropped off into the unwonted luxury of a morning nap.

In the midst of a beautiful dream of ease and rest, a voice aroused me, saying, "Come, Kesiah, I must have some breakfast."

Lazily opening my eyes, I saw *him* standing beside the bed with watch in hand, upon the dial of which *he* was gazing with rueful countenance. "Come, hurry up, or breakfast will be late."

"Late ! cannot she do as little as that and be punctual ?" cried I.

"But she has not come down at all."

"Then why do you not call her ?"

"Oh ! I do not wish to do that ; she might not like it."

"Well *I* will call her ;" and with that laudable determination I quickly arose and dressed, but when that was accomplished I discovered that all hope of breakfast at the proper time was lost if I wasted another moment waiting ; so I hurriedly and with *his* assistance arranged the breakfast table, and just as the clock sounded the hour, and the last touch was given, the door opened and "Peggotty" entered, as unconcerned as though the thought had never occurred to her that any part of her duty had been neglected.

I pleasantly bade her good morning, and inquired if she rested well the night before.

"Yes," she curtly replied.

I foolishly thought I would not mention anything about her morning's neglect, thinking she could not be impertinent enough to repeat it ; but as might have been expected she *did*.

After breakfast I attended to some preparations for the dinner, and after giving her some directions I returned to my own room to put that and myself in order ; for my late rising and unexpected labors had caused a more hasty toilet than was my morning custom. I had planned to retain the care of my own room, as I wished one spot in the house to be saved from intrusion.

Towards the dinner hour I went into the kitchen and compounded a salad for dinner.

I watched the sour visage lighten somewhat whilst I was busy, and she was more inclined to conversation

than ever before, but when I turned to leave her to finish, the cloud dropped like a veil again.

"That is the game, is it? You will be willing to work, provided I am working at the same time; but I shall not agree to the conditions, my dear 'Peggotty,'" was my mental reflection, as I coolly wended my way back to the parlor, and threw myself upon the sofa to await the announcement of dinner. I was awakened from a refreshing nap by a sharp voice calling that dinner was waiting.

After bathing my face, I felt quite an appetite for the dinner, that I had not been forced wholly to prepare. Upon going to the dining-room I was somewhat amused at the look of perplexity upon *his* face, as he was in vain trying to propitiate the goddess of our household joys, by flattering her upon her success in serving up the roast, done just to his favorite turn, which she acknowledged by something betwixt a groan and a snivel, accompanied by a ludicrous lugubriousness of countenance. During the dinner hour we endeavored, to our utmost, to converse in a manner and upon indifferent subjects that would give her opportunity to join with us, but it was useless. Unless directly addressed she would do nothing except retain her most unhappy expressions of countenance.

Whether she could not or would not talk we knew not then, nor never knew. I hailed the time to leave the table with internal joy, for it was as dispiriting as a ma-

larial atmosphere. I thought "she may be trusty and faithful, but where is the gain that was held out as an inducement, so far as friendliness and companionship are concerned."

Surely it would have been much pleasanter to have employed a "servant," that would not have expected to have been received at the table, or in the sitting-room ; then *he* and I could at least have enjoyed ourselves ; now she would not with all her favors appreciate them, and was a perfect incubus upon our pleasures. I suggested as much to *him* that evening after she had retired, and I had once more informed her of our breakfast hour, and that *he* would have a fire ready for her at a certain hour.

He informed me that she "would be more companionable when her girlish bashfulness wore away ; and that we could *not* think of having the usual stamp of help in the house ; we could never put up with it ; perhaps they would not stay more than six weeks, and it would keep you in a worry to be constantly changing ; and 'Peggotty' will probably stay as long as we need her, if it is years, even, for she must have a home, and will know enough to appreciate a quiet place like this ; to be sure she shows plainly that she *is* peculiar, but they all have their little quips and quirks ; and, my dear, you will soon learn how to *manage* her to the best advantage. Six months hence you will, doubtless, pronounce her invaluable."

I thought it wiser to await events than to prolong the discussion of uncertainties. The next morning I arose at the usual hour, dressed my hair and went out, thinking, as I had heard nothing of "Peggotty," I would remind her by a call, and then would rest myself by a morning dream on the sitting-room lounge.

When I reached the dining-room the fragrance of potatoes boiling met my sensitive nostrils, and I thought "Peggotty must have come down unheard by me ;" but upon investigation, I found *he* was "getting breakfast," for he had sagaciously divined my purpose—to insist upon her performing her duties—and, in fear lest she might be indignant thereat, and give her notice, he doubly preferred, he assured me, to assist about the breakfast, as that seemed the only thing that she entirely neglected. So I meekly donned an apron, magnanimously and *silently* relinquished my morning dream, and followed his suggestion (a bewitching way I have of doing *daily*, but would not have it known for worlds !), and in a short space of time breakfast was served for the trinity, and the triumvirate was soon complete, for as soon as the last step was taken for breakfast, as before, did "Peggotty" open the door and enter, to partake of the breakfast we had prepared for her.

The thought at once struck me that I should really like to know how long she had been waiting there, so as to be able to enter at the proper moment—like an actor when his cue is given.

The days following passed in about the same manner. I made not the least progress in cultivating “Peggotty’s” good nature. In fact I was unable to find that she possessed any. One thing I could say, she appeared *even* dispositioned—the same morose manner yesterday, to-day and to-morrow—and that, as I told *him*, was something to be able to know what to depend upon, not to feel that some sudden freak might derange your best laid plans.

Matters went forward in this *contented* manner until she had been with us *just* a week, when an old gentleman called to see her, and, as she took him into the dining-room, I did not know but at last her heart was to be besieged, and we should lose our acquisition; but I learned later that he wished to engage her, to go as nurse and housekeeper for an old lady that was nearly bedridden, and she agreed to go the next week; therefore, at the tea-table, we were informed that she should leave Saturday night. I had some difficulty in repressing a nervous desire to scream with laughter, for my first thought was of *his* faith that she might stay *years*, if I did not insist upon her attending to the breakfast duties.

He tried to influence her to change her mind and stay with us, but in vain; I said less, for I could not appreciate that she was much of a treasure. I urged her to re-consider merely sufficient to clear myself of the possible suspicion *he* might indulge in—that of my wishing her to go.

She stated she had no complaint whatever to make, but she thought she would "try that place a few weeks. Maybe I shall not stay long, but shall go out to sewing awhile, and see if I like that. I do not wish to settle down until I know what will suit me best."

"Being youthful and of a flighty temperament must be her excuse. When she is older she will steady down," said I to *him*, as Saturday night I paid her ten days' wages, and turned to look at *his* disconsolate face.

"What shall we do?" And he looked blankly at me.

"I do not know, unless we board, for it is too much to change help every ten days. Now I must work whether I feel able or not, until we find 'Peggotty' No. 2," said I, rather bitterly.

"Oh, we cannot board; we should lose all the comforts of a home, and we cannot give those up, dear. I'll find somebody soon, and with my help you will get along somehow."

CHAPTER III.

BARKIS APPEARS.

"GET along somehow." Yes, I did for three weeks, but, as I look back upon it, vainly do I try to realize *how* it was done. A house that is daily kept in good order is comparatively easy to manage, and had I been even half able to work, another "Peggotty" should never have darkened my doors. But the flesh is weak while the spirit is strong, and bow to fate I must.

Kind friends soon found just *the* person ; *he* had spent time enough to have paid a servant a month's wages, but unsuccessfully, and we were quite discouraged until a friend sent us the information that a young American girl, from a neighboring State, was at this time in the vicinity looking for just such a situation as ours would be. She was of Scotch-Irish descent, a Protestant and church member, possessed a fair education, and would not work out unless she could be treated like "one of the family."

I did not wish a young girl for various reasons : they are too unsteady, have too much company, and are desirous of being more intimate than I should care to submit to.

But necessity knows no law, and our need of assistance was daily increasing, so, with a grimace, *I* accepted the situation.

One dim, cloudy Monday morning I ushered Maggie—a pug-faced, frowzly-headed, chubby-bodied girl—into the wash-room and introduced her to the week's washing ; and as she dipped her hands in a tub of water, with prophetic carelessness, the sudden splash dashed a heavy sprinkling upward upon her impudent, saucy-looking features and crinkly hair, and she was thereby christened, and henceforth to us renounced her former name of Maggie, and became our “Peggotty” the Second. I informed her that, when able to do so, I would assist about the dinner Mondays, but, with that exception, we should expect her to do the whole of the work.

“Yes, ma’am,” she replied, with an assumed look of meekness, that did not deceive me as to the real character that would, perhaps, one day develop for our benefit. Night came and I could find no particular fault with the work, except that it had taken her *all* day—a thing that is rather exasperating to a woman that knows by actual experience that all can be neatly “cleared up” in a half day. But I was determined not to find fault outwardly, unless absolutely obliged to. If things fretted me I could retire to the parlor and shut them out.

Therefore at night, with an air of cheerfulness, I introduced “Peggotty” the Second to the bijou of a room that was now sacred to the priestesses of household

duties. Many were her expressions of delight, such as—
“Indeed and I'll never want to leave here ; the room is pretty as a parlor.”

I expressed the hope that we should mutually be satisfied, and, reminding her of the breakfast hour, bade her good night.

He inquired anxiously if I thought she would suit me. With a laugh I owned “my impressions are not favorable. The poodle-dog style rarely turn out well.”

I retired to rest that night in the full consciousness that (making due allowance for sudden death and sickness) I should not “get” breakfast in the morning, if there was none till day after to-morrow.

In pursuance of which plan, the next morning, after awaking with the full glare of the sun in my face, I coolly turned my head to avoid the light, and settled myself for a nice rest. The restless pacing on the piazza betokened that *some one* was a little anxious about the breakfast, but, true to the promise made unto my feeble body, I still enjoyed myself.

Soon, however, *his* disquieted face presented itself at the door. “You will have to get up or I shall not be down to the office in season.”

“Call ‘Peggotty’ the Second, my dear.”

“I do not wish to ; she might not like it. The potatoes are *now* nearly done. Hadn’t you better get up ? There is not much to do.”

“My dear, what do we pay ‘Peggotty’?”

With a look of surprise he answered, "Why?—three dollars a week."

"And allow her every Sunday to go to her sister's, each afternoon to sew for herself, or go out, unless I am sick (always provided, of course, that she does the 'housework' *first*—which she can do easily), do we not?"

"Yes."

"When I was somewhat stronger than now, though far from well, did I not do the same, and, in addition, *all* the *making* and *mending*?"

"Yes."

"How much would you have thought I ought to have been allowed for spending money, in consideration thereof—twelve dollars a month?"

He laughed in an embarrassed manner at my novel way of ascertaining if he thought "Peggotty" would more than earn her wages if she got the breakfast. Yet I could not induce him to call her.

"Then," said I quietly, "there seems no way but that you must await her pleasure. Were I able I would not only 'get' the breakfast, but 'do' all the work in preference to having any one 'do' it for us, but the only hope now of my ever being able to do so, consists in taking rest," and I composedly adjusted my head a trifle more comfortably, and once more advised him to call "Peggotty" the Second.

But no, if I was determined that "Peggotty" should

do the work, that she was paid for doing, *he* was none the less decided that *he* should not run the risk of being obliged to again go “Peggotty-hunting,” by offending the present incumbent through reminding her of the time of her duties.

As I heard him “setting” the table, my heart almost relented, and then I thought I will *not* be so foolish, for it is not right, and, with a laugh, I wondered if *that* was one of the “home comforts” he was preserving by the present management. I thought, young man, if you were boarding you could at least depend upon having your food at certain hours.

Just as the clock struck the breakfast hour, and I had finished my toilet, I heard a heavy slip-shod step on the stairs, and knew that “Peggotty” the Second was about to arrive on the field of action.

Busying myself about my room, I was careful to keep employed until called to breakfast. *He* came in for me with a hurt expression upon his face, as though I had wronged him, saying, “We must hurry ; I shall be half an hour late now.”

“I am very sorry ; you must call ‘Peggotty’ tomorrow morning sufficiently early. This will never do.”

He replied not, but looked at me as if he thought I might just “get breakfast” if “Peggotty” did not wish to.

But that was nothing compared to the horrified look that overspread his face, when I said, mildly (after bid-

ding her good morning), “I am very sorry you overslept this morning ; it makes it *so* bad for *him*. After this I will have him call you when he builds the fire. I ought to have had him done so this morning.”

I knew he was trembling lest she should refuse to stay, but I thought if she did not intend to do her duty she might as well leave first as last. But she was not ready to leave so soon what promised to be an easy berth and prompt payment. After this “Peggotty” attended to the morning meal—not always as promptly as she should have done—but she did attend to it ; the work was done after a fashion. Many times I had to keep strong control of my feelings, but I began to realize that I had entered upon a trying experience, and must learn to bear it.

“Peggotty” developed many strange freaks : one day full of life and fun, amounting to impertinence—if she had been a servant, but as “Peggotty”—ahem ; another time she would pout with her rose-bud (cabbage-rose) lips and her pug nose more puggy than ever ; then she would hurry her work out of the way and pay strict attention to her correspondence. Then she usually gave her notice about once in three weeks and was going home—she “felt anxious-like.”

“Are any of your people sick ?”

“No, ma’am, but I’m anxious-like.”

Then she would come to me and wish to take back her notice ; she had made up her mind not to go home ; perhaps she might go before long to her aunt’s—she had

friends there ; but she would stay with me a while longer. So the months passed, now "giving her notice," then feeling "anxious-like ;" next it would be, "maybe soon I'll go to my aunt's—I have *friends* there."

One day I found her in tears. "What is the matter, 'Peggotty' ? "

"Oh, ma'am, I wish I knew where Bob was—I feel so anxious-like."

"Who is Bob—your brother ? "

"No, ma'am, he is a fellow that courted me when I was only sixteen, and he's gone West, and doesn't write to me now, and whether he wants me or not I don't know, so I don't know what answer to make to this letter from Dick. Here 'tis, ma'am—what shall I answer ? "

Considerably amused, I proceeded to read the following letter :

"Dere Maggie I have ritten to you twise sense you last rote to me why don't you rite you have promised fore times to marri me and then you put it of I bleave now that you lied to me that you do like Bob better nor me tho you said you didn't but every time you put it of and say wate til you have bin home you want to see your mother, I bleave you want to see Bob or here from him. your last letter you said you would stop riting to me any more I dont think that is fare as menny times as you have set in my lap and you said you would have me now Maggy you aint used me rite but I like you and Ive got another gold ring Ile give you if you will marry me now dont have Bob. have me do

Yours til deth Dick."

When I had finished reading the above, the pudgy face, covered with tears, was lifted, and she pitifully asked, "Shall I marry Dick or wait and see if Bob wants me?"

"Do you not know which you prefer?"

"Yes, ma'am; but I aint heard nothing from Bob in three years. I want him—boo-hoo-o-o—boo-hoo—but maybe he is dead or married—oh, boo-hoo. I feel so anxious like, it makes me most sick; some days I cannot work. I know I told Dick I would marry him, but I want Bob. I like him best."

"What have you been encouraging Dick for, then?" I sternly asked.

"Oh, ma'am, Bob was gone so long, and I wanted a fellow just a much as the other girls; and we must all marry sometime, you know, ma'am, and it might as well be Dick as anybody, if it can't be Bob. But sometimes I get to thinking that I'll wait awhile longer for Bob, and *then* I tell Dick I am never going to marry anybody; not that I mean it, ma'am, for I'll soon coax him back if I want him, when I'm sure about Bob. That's the way to manage them, ma'am; they'll like you just as well and better for all the trouble you give them, ma'am," and she looked up at me with a shrewd grin.

"'Peggotty,'" said I, with some severity in my voice, "I am ashamed of your folly. You do not care for either of the young men. You are just a vain coquette."

"Indeed I do care. If you could have known how my

heart has ached for Bob as I was sitting by the parlor window in Dick's lap many a Sunday afternoon, you'd never say that cruel word to me—'don't care!' Oh, Dick,—oh-h-h, Bob—boo-hoo—hoo-o-o-o—how Dick—would—say, Maggy—what makes—ye so still, and I'd—say nothing—ailed me—but I'd be—thinking—all the time—as I looked out—of the window—that I wished—I could see—Bob coming—up the road—like as he—used to. Oh I used to feel so bad, boo-hoo-o-o-o-o-o; but Dick never knew of what I was thinking," and she grinned shrewdly through her tears. "He thought I liked him. It aint best to let the men know the truth, ma'am."

By this time you may be assured I was becoming disgusted with the simpleton's folly and wickedness, and gave her a sound lecture upon her conduct. Finally she checked her sobs, and decided to try and be a little more sensible. She said she would write at once to Dick and refuse him entirely, would forget her old friend Bob, and attend more faithfully to her daily duties hereafter; feeling somewhat consoled, I fancied, by the sugar-coating I had given my lecture, that "patient waiters were no losers."

As I turned to leave her she said, "Wait, ma'am, and read *this* if you please," drawing another letter from her pocket.

"I do not care to read it; send it back to him with the others."

"But this is not from Dick—this is another. Shall I answer it?" and she passed me one, received that morning from the office, directed in a professional handwriting.

MY DEAR MAGGIE—Do not chide me for calling you so upon our short acquaintance ; the heart, my dear, is not bound by conventionalities, and recognizes its affinity at sight ; the hours have dragged their weary length along heavily, indeed, since I saw your sweet face, Maggie darling, last Saturday evening on the train. I feel assured that I shall love you, and you only, forever more. Will you meet me on the train next Saturday evening ? Be in the second coach, darling, and there you will meet me once more. Thine.

BLACK MOUSTACHE.

"Peggotty," said I sternly, "have you been indulging in a flirtation with a stranger on the train ? and gave him your address, as this letter proves ! Are you simple or crazy ?"

"Neither, ma'am ; all the girls flirt on the train now-a-days. Maybe they didn't when you were young [as if that was long ago], but its the fashion now."

"Fashion, indeed ! What nonsense. No girl that had any self-respect would do such a thing."

"Well, ma'am, Belle Sykes, the school-teacher, was on the train, and a fellow that was with 'Black Moustache' sat in the seat with her, and they flirted worse than we did, for I heard him ask her for some flowers from her bouquet. She gave him some ; he kissed them and put them in a brown leather tobacco case. They

thought nobody saw them. She kinder shied them out to him, and he kinder shied them into that little case, and told her, almost in a whisper (but I heard it), that he should keep them till he died as a *snuffnear* of the evening. She said, ‘ You don’t mean it.’ ‘ Yes, I do,’ said he ; and he asked her if she did not wish they could ride onward forever ; and he promised to write to her—he did—and I think that was the letter she got last night that made her blush so. I was down to the post office, and I heard the minister ask her if she was ill—he said she looked feverish—but I knew that it was the letter from her light-whiskered friend that she gave the snuffnear to ;” and “Peggotty” chuckled at her superiority in judgment.

“ Blushed ! I should thought she would. It does not seem possible that Belle Sykes would be guilty of such imprudence.”

“ Why, all the girls do, ma’am. The school girls that go on the cars have all got beaux that they write to, and hand the billets to as they get off the train. I wish I could go to school on the cars ;” she sighed heavily at this point. “ There is Nettie Carr is in love *now* with the brakeman on the rear car of the down train, and so she always goes in that car, and he brings her a letter every day, and she carries him one, and he has given her some red ear-rings, and she had to tell her mother that Nellie Barron gave them to her ; for old Mrs. Carr is awful fussy, and says she would not let Nettie go on the

cars if she was as wild as some of the girls are. Nettie says her mother is dreadful old-fashioned, and thinks nobody ought to speak to a gentleman without an introduction, unless in case of terrible danger or accident. Nellie Barron thinks Conductor Buffum is *just* splendid, if it wasn't for the bother that he is married ! Kate Paxton is engaged to the fellow that checks the baggage, and Dora Booth wears a ring that one of the clerks in Bassett's store gave her ; that is where the school girls all do their shopping, for the clerks are *just jolly* ; and Emma Stone——”

“ Stop ! For heaven's sake, are you telling the truth ? Do you know, ‘ Peggotty,’ that what you have told me would drive those girls' parents frantic, cause the girls to be expelled from school, and, innocent as the romantic and ignorant creatures may be of any evil intention, yet to make these things public would blast their reputation forever ? For the sake of the girls, never speak of these things again ; to let them reach the ear of some gossip will be the death blow to their future happiness. Yet their parents *must* be warned somehow or the girls are lost. Now throw *your* letter in the fire and attend to the dinner. I must think this matter over and how their parents can best be warned without giving any offence ; ” and I turned once more to leave the room.

“ But, ma'am, to-day is Saturday, and I would like to go up to Otranto this afternoon and do some shopping, if you can spare me.”

"Spare you, 'Peggotty ;' I could easily do that, but I cannot allow you to go for the purpose of meeting a stranger. Have I not made myself sufficiently plain ? If not I will do so now. After what I have said, if you go to-night for the purpose of meeting that scoundrel, you will leave here at once and forever."

"I do not wish to lose a good place where I am treated like 'one of the family,' for such places are not found at every corner, but I think you are wrong in calling him a scoundrel. He was just beautiful. The girls *all* said he was the handsomest man that was on the train last week ; and Nellie Barron said she fairly envied me my good luck, he was such a *nice* young man ; he looked so noble and so true that he made her think of Mr. Rochester that was so good, and loved Jane Eyre so dearly ; she said maybe *he* would love me so, and come and marry me if I *was* a servant. I just told her I was *not* a servant—that I was treated always just like 'one of the family.' And I *do* think its funny you should be so set against my going to see him, when just *his* making much of me on the cars has shown the girls that I am as good as they are ; *this* week they have made lots of me at the depot, and it's all because it *opened* their eyes to see *him* notice me."

I left the room in disgust ; I could not doubt the truth of these statements, disagreeable as it was, for what I had myself witnessed among the school girls on the morning and evening trains only confirmed the whole. I had known that black-eyed Jennie Mann had upon two

occasions lost an elegant hat in passing from one car to another to ascertain if certain swains were on the train, and that she was known on the train as the girl who was in the habit of wearing her millinery so carelessly that, in her frequent passings from car to car in pursuit of the beaux, she had sent many valuable head-gears to the hidden realms of "Old Boreas," and that for this reason the milliners vied with each other in their efforts to secure her custom. *Of course* Mrs. Mann believed her daughter's sad tale—that the coaches were *so* crowded she was forced to run the risk of her life as well as wardrobe in pursuit of a seat !

I had seen Conductor Blink familiarly pinch the ear of pretty Josie Seabury, and drop a paper of bon-bons in the lap of Nannie Holbrook, saying, "There is what I promised you, Bright Eyes." I had seen the alacrity with which some of the best looking brakemen hurried to the school girls' car to assist them off whenever opportunity offered. I always dropped a word of warning in the presence of parents, and invariably found that they all appreciated the truth of it, and would say, "If my daughter was not *so* different from the other girls I should not dare to trust her, but she may be a restraint upon them, and thus do some good by going, whilst no harm can come to her."

Oh, blind mothers !

A few weeks later "Peggotty" had been sulky for many days, and appeared as if she was feeling "anxious-

like" again. I asked no questions, for I did not feel romantically inclined, and cared not to witness another deluge of salt water, nor listen to an operatic chorus of Bob—boo-hoo-o-o-o—Dick or Bob, which shall it be?—boo-hoo-o-o.

But a crisis was doubtless approaching, and, after days of preliminary sighing, pouting, simpering and sulking, "Peggotty" informed me that she had been "a dwelling on it," and had decided "to forget Bob, as maybe he was dead," and she had written to Dick and "asked him to make up, and in the spring she would marry him." As he had answered her offer favorably she would leave in two months, and go to her aunt's to be married, and go home to her mother on a wedding tour.

I thought advice would be wasted on such a shallow-pated damsel, so congratulated her and decided to make the most of the intervening time looking for No. 3.

When *he* came to dinner it was to announce the rumor that Kate Paxton had failed to return to her home the night before; that the "Baggage-Expressed-sir?—Checked-to-all-Way-Stations" was off duty for a fortnight, and, to the dismay of her friends, it was surmised that the two had eloped! Kate had begged her mother's permission to wear her brown silk suit that day at school, and it was now expected that it had served as a bridal dress.

I turned to "Peggotty" with, "Now do you realize the danger that I tried to explain to you?"

"Danger ! I think it's splendid. Oh-h-h—it—makes—me—think—of—Bob—boo-hoo-hoo-o-o-o."

I must confess that I laughed partly at her ridiculous conduct, and partly at the perplexed look upon *his* face. I knew *he* thought she must be crazy ; and perhaps she was—I called it idiocy.

She left the table a mixture of Bobs, tears, Dicks and boo-hoos all intermingled, but, as I told *him* afterwards, rather more Bob than other ingredients.

I explained to him that she had decided to leave us, and he might be on the lookout for some one to take her place.

"I thought *she* would stay as long as we wished her ? We *cannot* put up with changing help as often as this."

"Then suppose we board ?" spoke I with eagerness.

"No, no ; we cannot give up our home and its comforts."

"Has it seemed like home lately ?"

He colored and hastily said, "At any rate she has given us a very fair notice. I have two months to find some one ; I need not hurry." *He* never liked to hurry ; he feared to act hastily lest he should repent at his leisure.

She was very dull all the afternoon and evening, and in the morning she came with swollen eyes to the dining room with two letters she wished mailed ; one we saw was for Dick, and the other for her mother.

After breakfast she came to my room and said she did not

rest well the night before, and she had thought it all over and made up her mind she could not give Bob up unless he was dead, or if alive would not have her ; so she had written to Dick that she was going home to spend the winter, and get ready to marry him in the spring. "That is what I tell him," she said with her cunning grin distorting her features, "but I am going home to find Bob if I can, and if he will have me I shall marry *him*, and Dick won't know till it is too late to hinder it ; but if Bob is dead or doesn't want me, I shall come back to my aunt's in the spring and marry Dick ; and he will never know that I wanted Bob ; so, ma'am, I think I will leave next Saturday night, and go to my aunt's and make a visit and good up Dick, so that he will be all right if I don't hear from Bob."

I thought it worse than useless to urge the unsettled creature to stay, only to have the scene repeated in a week perhaps ; and once more we were looking for a "Peggotty."

He looked rather blank at the prospect, but tried to be cheerful, consoled by the old adage that there is luck the *third* time.

CHAPTER IV.

PETER PRUE.

THE cold dreary months of winter had worn away, leaving me nervous, and wistfully looking forward for spring beauties and joys. How I longed for a mild day that I might once more emerge into the outer world and breathe the fresh air ; and one day in my melancholy I found myself almost unconsciously scribbling a sonnet, an act I had never before in my most fanciful moods attempted. With surprise I inspected my work and took a diagnosis of my case ; if my mind had reached the point of essaying poetry, methought, I must be ill mentally as well as physically, and I decided that pure air I *must* have for a restorative or there was no telling what I might do next that was absurd. And I insisted that *he* must take me out for a drive along the pleasant country roads to aid me in recovering my accustomed mental equilibrium. Never did I enjoy a drive like that ; the unwonted excitement of being in the open air, inhaling the fresh scents of growing grass and budding, blossoming plants and shrubs, was like drinking of the elixir of life. The bubbling, noisy rivulets, playing hide and seek in the meadows on either hand, and rushing saucily across the roads beneath the rude rustic bridges,

had all the charms of novelty for me. The short hour's drive filled me with the enthusiasm of youth and health, and as I alighted at the gate, with a handful of arbutus and anemones gathered by the wayside, I felt new strength and hope to support me in my unequal struggle with life and its attendant Peggotties.

With the early spring I had secured another "Peggotty," a stout, rugged maiden lady, light-haired and pale-eyed, the prim daughter of Deacon Humbug.

There was one quality she displayed early and late and upon all occasions that was very gratifying—she had full faith that "neatness was akin to holiness"—and she took the utmost pains that all around me should be of the purest and cleanliest. It was such a pleasure to be constantly supplied with the freshest collars, cuffs and handkerchiefs, as well as in all the general details.

She also took great pains in her own attire—her hair was always freshly crimped, and her delicately-tinted prints were always of the freshest.

She aped the youthful style of dress rather more than was in good taste, and her principal thoughts were bent upon the *how*, and "wherewithal shall we be clothed."

When attired for the afternoon in her light-blue cashmere, cut and trimmed exceedingly girlishly, and telling what she would like and meant to have sometime, but if she only *had*, should only wear it upon "state" occasions, I used to wonder that any one accustomed from their youth up, to the meagrest allowance of this world's comforts,

should have such absurd longings for the things that they would not know the use of, nor have any suitable occasion to use them if they did. When the "state" day would occur upon which *she* would wear her India shawl, even did she obtain it, was a mystery to me that was never solved.

I was thinking one day, at least *this* "Peggotty" can never (whatever other strange freak she may take) make me a confidant of her past love affairs; for such a prudish personage must have been utterly exempt. Not long after this a friend told me that two old bachelor brothers, that lived together, were looking for a house-keeper, and some one had told them of my old maid, and I might therefore expect an effort would be made to secure her. I kept my own counsel on the subject, thinking we might hear no more of it, but one day the mail contained a letter for "Peggotty" the Third, that agitated her very much.

"I think it is insulting for any one to write me such a letter—who is Peter Prue?" she burst out excitedly.

"An old bachelor in Sigamond," I replied demurely, yet well knowing by the name what was coming.

"Well, who has been putting him up to write me such a letter as this? I have done nothing that I should be insulted like this. Maid, indeed! Who has dared to speak of me as a maid? I never was a *maid*, and I never will be. I am above that. Read this, and see what you think of it," and she passed me a dingy,

wrinkled half sheet of paper, upon which was scrawled the following epistle to "Peggotty" the Third :

frogtown Juli 2th 1866

miss humbug i want yu tu cum tu wurk fur me thare is but tu tu cook fur and tu tu wash and ayarn fur yu kan du as yu ples just as yu ples Yu kan go alone or i will go with yu whare yu want to go thare is a band here that plais twise a weke and i kan git them tu cum and plai fur yu anytime if yu want me tu i plai the violin i will pai good pai fur the wurk thare is tu du think well of this before yu send wurd send wurd to peter prue frogtown I liv about 40 rods from the post office

yures truli peter prue.

p s think well befour yu send wurd if yu kant cum know cum in the sprin know cum know surely cum

yures truli peter prue.

p s thare is plenti of gurles hear fur cumpany and plenti of boas tu go tu the dances with yu

yure p p.

p s know cum du cum fur i want a good made and house ceeper the wurk is esy du cum

yures truli peter p

I controlled my risibles as I read it, and mentally ejaculated, "What next?"

"What do you think of the letter?" she inquired, as I folded it up.

"Nothing, except that he wishes help and some one has praised you to him."

"But who has thought so meanly of me, as that I would go to such a place to keep house—a nest of old bachelors?" she sneered.

The letter and its probable instigators was the principal subject upon her mind for many days, to the exclusion of her wonted carefulness in regard to her domestic duties. The thought that it was the work of some one to play a joke upon her really wore upon her health.

One afternoon, after a lengthy discussion of what she should do, as she had been unable in the town, to find any sage green gloves to match her new suit—which weighty subject for the time being excluded all minor thoughts—she suddenly changed the subject to an animated discussion of her correspondent, Peter Prue.

“Have you answered his letter yet?” I inquired.

“Do you mean to insult me? Of course I haven’t. I would not stoop to do it.”

“Then he will probably write again, thinking you have not received the first.”

“What *shall* I do if he does? Who can have instigated him to do this? Do people think that I, who have had such offers, and might have married as well as I could have done, would degrade myself by going to such a place as that? It would utterly ruin my prospects for making a good marriage.”

“So ho,” thought I; “never too old to hope. The example of Biblical Sarah is an ever-shining beacon of hope and pillar of faith to the maidens of each descending generation.”

She appeared to dwell sadly upon some mournful reflection, and, in a musing tone, said, “I might have

been married ere this, and lived in a brown stone mansion on Beacon street, had I chosen."

"Then why did you not choose to do so? I should have thought such a flattering prospect would not have been easily resisted."

"Yes, it was tempting, and we were engaged; but after that he was so presuming he wished to kiss me at parting, and when we met after his long absences, and he wished to sit on the sofa beside me—liberties that I did not consider at all proper, even if we were engaged. He yielded the point of the privilege of sitting beside me, but continually insisted that I should kiss him, said it was his right, and if I loved him I would like to do so; but I still refused, and he accused me of being prudish about it—a thing I know I was never guilty of in regard to anything. One bright afternoon he called on me, and I chanced to be in the sitting-room alone, embroidering some trifle or other, and when I came to need my embroidery scissors, I looked in vain for them, until detecting by Burt's looks that he knew where they were. When I accused him of hiding them he said he had them in his vest pocket, and would willingly return them in exchange for a kiss. I told him he was really impertinent to ask such a thing; he says, 'Look upon your fore-finger and think of the promise you gave me when I placed that ring there, and then say if you think I have not a right to wish or expect a kiss.' I told him that when we were married I would kiss him and not be-

fore ; he begged me to think better of it, but I would not, and he said, ‘Then you do not love me and we will part,’ and we did—and I am now living here as a house-keeper—and he is married and with a large family of boys and girls, resides in an elegant mansion—but they are not mine,” she added sadly.

“I hope his wife kisses him occasionally at least,” said I, somewhat maliciously I fear.

“What !” said she, in a surprised tone of voice, “do you think I was foolish ; that I ought to have kissed him ? ”

“Most certainly you ought to have done so ; it was your duty.”

With a look of astonishment flashing out from each faded feature, she asked, “Did your husband ever kiss you before you were married ? ”

“If he had not I would not have married him,” I retorted.

She looked at me in blank amazement.

Just then the postman rang the bell and I found among the letters one from “Peggotty’s” Peter (or perhaps he would like to play *Barkis*—that is what I suspected was at the root of this desire to win my help away).

“Was ever anything *so* impudent ; do just read this ! ”

I took the paper, covered with curiously-formed scraggling figures, and read as follows :

frogtown juli sicktene 1866

dere mis humbug i rit tu yu tu weaks ago and have hearn nothing yit so i sposse the male got miscarried and i will know rite agin if yu got my letter yu no what i want onli i want more than i told yu i want yu tu cum on trial as made and house ceeper and if yu like and i like we mite git marrid wich wood be cheper fur me than to pai a made and better fur yu tu have a good home than tu wurk oute fur a livin the wurk aint hard and i will help yu and plai the violin fur yu when yu wurk tu be cumpany for yu. the washings and ayarnings aint hard and the rest of the wurk is esy we will have lots of cumpany if yu cum a man what nos yu says yu a good cook and ~~kekernomical~~ and i wish yu wood cum i think we shuld both be suted know cum du cum for i no i shall want yu tu stay my house is good and warm and yu will like ples cum sone or let me no when yu will

yures truli peter prue

p s dont forgit that I will pai good pai fur the wurk

yures peter prue.

p s cum by sprin sure and lern to no

p p

"What *man* do you suppose has dared to practice a joke like this upon me? Who that knows me would dare do such a vile thing. I never was a servant for any one; and if I ever marry it will be a man of wealth and position, that can furnish servants to wait upon me. I do think it is a shame; and if folks are going to think that because I live here with you that I would go anywhere it is time that I left and put a stop to such ideas. I never was called a servant, and I never will be. If, when I am married, enemies should tell my husband that I had been a servant I should be mortified to death; so

I will give my notice, and shall go back to my father's a week from Saturday. I had rather have less monev than to ruin my chances for the future."

The next professional call the doctor made *he* gave him (the doctor) a slight sketch of the reason I was to lose *this* "Peggotty," and to say there was *some* meriment upon the part of the two gentlemen slightly expresses it.

The doctor thought the *if* and *when* she should marry was well put in ; the contrast between her desires and her real situation, between the offer she had or professed to have received in her youth and her present "Barkis" (peter prue), was by them considered ludicrous. *He* and the doctor, after a consultation upon the symptoms and possibilities, unanimously decided upon the verdict that *this* was the last flicker of the candle of hope for her ; that if she refused Peter she would find herself in the dark night of despair, as far as her future chances were concerned.

Her worriment of mind during the remainder of her stay, lest she might have lost caste by her imprudence in assuming the duties of "house keeper" for us, furnished us with much diversion, at the same time that we fully realized we should miss her excessive cleanliness and have many another "Peggotty" ere we should find as perfect a housekeeper. The quirks and peculiarities she manifested that would utterly preclude her ever attaining the height of her ambition—that of marrying a

wealthy gentleman of talent—were no objection to us, who were satisfied that she was competent for the position she was now in, even if we doubted her capabilities for filling that to which she aspired.

But like all her predecessors she rendered herself obnoxious to us whilst she worked her notice. *That* custom, with Peggotties at least, should be abolished. It was therefore with joy that we hailed the close of the reign of “Peggotty” the Third, and we looked forward with hope to the coronation of her successor, and prayed that the next reign might be productive of comfort to our disheartened spirits. *He* admitted that we *were* about as much bothered as though we employed servants, and he did not know but we might be nearly as comfortable even boarding as we were now in what we termed home, but which had long since lost its chief charms.

He might as well board as far as feeling that he could take a guest home to dine or spend a night; no boarding-mistress could wear a more forbidding countenance than our “quean’s” upon such an event.

CHAPTER V.

PEGGOTTY IS NOT WILLIN'.

THE intervening weeks between the abdication of the throne by "Peggotty" the Third and the accession to power of her successor, "Peggotty" the Fourth, was filled by volunteers from the rank and file of mother, sisters, nieces, aunts and cousins.

I sometimes think if it had not been for these respites (to me) in which I luxuriated in a freedom from care, and learned from the past dearth how sweet home comforts were, that had it not been for these rests my health, under the mental anxiety, would have become a complete wreck.

He, after a few weeks "hunting," had succeeded in bringing in captive a bright-eyed, witchy, little, broken-down "school ma'am," that had nearly ruined her voice by years of constant teaching, and had decided to take up with her old physician's advice and "do house-work." He told her frankly if she had been rich he should have, after the custom of his profession, recommended a year's travel, "but you are not, and light exercise and change are what you need. *I* know of no better way to get them than to enter some family—put your pride in your

pocket—and take up a house-maid's duties, thus securing your health and good home at one and the same time."

I was not over pleased, for I thought "if such persons as I have had have been jealous, lest they should lose caste, how can I ever keep her ? "

It was soon plain that the programme was to be entirely new ; she gave a toss of her head and a gleeful laugh at the idea of losing her own pretty soubriquet in that of "Peggotty" the Fourth. " Well, if I am ' Peggotty,' I trust ' Barkis' will soon make his appearance ; the Irish help have their ' followers,' I trust you allow your Peggotties to receive their Barkises."

Her manner was as refreshing as a breeze from a blossoming meadow in summer time.

" Now, what shall I do first ? "

" You may dust my room and put it in order."

The tiny creature went to work, and I, with much interest, watched her futile efforts to reach the top of the picture cords and knobs, with a long handled feather duster, even when standing tip-toe.

In a few moments she sighed, " oh, dear ! "

" What is the matter, Peggy ? "

" I shall have to be put upon the rack some day ! "

" Why, what for ? "

" Not for my sins, for I never done nothing," said she with a comical air of assumed innocence ; " but I'm so short between joints that I cannot work to advantage,

and I thought to be stretched on a rack might make me taller."

She had just finished my room when I heard a foot-step, and informed her that was the milkman and to get him a pitcher, and then put the milk in the refrigerator.

Soon she was flying back, her features alive with fun. "I think I've seen 'Barkis.' The milkman stared me almost out of countenance, and poured half the milk on the table through looking at me instead of the pitcher."

"That will never do, Peggy. Tell him next time that I wish him to pour his milk in the pitcher first and look at you afterwards."

"Yes'm, I will do so," and she went back demurely about her work singing "Silver threads among the gold."

You can imagine my astonishment next morning as, with an arch glance that completely destroyed the little self-possession the milkman evinced in her presence, she soberly told him to be careful about spilling the milk, delivering the message, word for word, as I had jokingly said to her the morning before.

The poor fellow in his excitement spilled the whole, and with a hasty "I'll bring in some more," dashed with glowing face out into the cool air and returned with double the usual quantity.

Afterward I said, "Why, Peggy, what made you speak so to the milkman?"

"I thought it my duty to obey orders," said she, with

quiet features but twinkling eyes, "and by this means you have an extra quantity of milk, out of which we can have a custard pudding for dinner ; so on the whole I think I have done shrewdly."

We grew quite attached to our Peggy, and our only fear was that we might not be able to keep her long ; though for her sake we were not sorry to see her steadily gaining in health and strength. But her rosy, pleasant face was too comforting a vision for us to look forward to parting with without regret.

She joked about "Barkis" and the milkman, and, although we said nothing, *he* and I thought that our doctor, who was a widower, was also in a "Barkis" state of mind. Still, as yet, there was nothing very apparent except a keen professional interest in her case, and *he* thought rather more tenderness and consideration in the treatment of it was displayed than is ordinarily to be expected. "Depend upon it, Kessy, *he* would not have quite so much sympathy for *your* throat."

We kept our own counsel, thinking that when the doctor wished to inform Peggy that he was "willin'," he would be able to do so without our assistance.

The milkman daily grew more enamored as the roses increased in pretty Peggy's cheeks, and our milk pitcher was more lavishly supplied than we paid for—which was the cause of many jokes at Peggy's expense, and many an extra pudding and blanc-mange to our profit.

I did pity the simple fellow, and had cautioned Peggy

about noticing him when he came in. She could leave the bowl on the table and absent herself at that time.

This plan worked well for a few days, then, in despair, he inquired of a servant girl in the yard if Peggy had left, and the next morning a note was found lying by the bowl of milk, addressed to "the girl." As she had never held any conversation with him, except to give some necessary order about the milk, he had never learned her name, and I do not see how she could prevent his falling in love with her pretty lips and bright eyes.

But I was sorry for the silly smitten youth as Peggy, full of fun, read me Barkis's letter :

Dere Miss. I have loved you from the first time I saw you at work, your bright eyes almost make me snow blind, and your cheeks make me long for peach time, and your mouth for cherries and cream. I do love you and always shall whuther you love me or not now my dere wont you be my dere wife I live at home with the old man, and he and the old woman both think Ime old enuff and ort to get marrid, and they say I have a good chance to pick out a wife goin round to so manny houses, and seein so manny folks. They want I should bring a wife right there to live, and I can have haff I make peddling milk and you can help the old woman. now I have picked you out and want you to put your anser in the picher tomorrow mornin.

I love you true

Jo Barker.

"Barker? That is very nearly Barkis, my dear Peggy. When will the wedding be? Soon, I suppose, for Jo., doubtless, is in a hurry, and as you are to go to his 'hum' there will not of necessity be much prepara-

tion. Peggy Barker! Quite a pretty name. I shall dislike to lose you, but cannot have the heart to thwart your glorious future, so temptingly spread before you. I must tell the doctor of your contemplated change of prospects, that he may congratulate you."

"No, no! Promise me you will not let him know of this. He is the last person I would have told of the ridiculous affair. He might—" She stopped suddenly.

"Might what?" I inquired.

"I don't know; I—I—he might;" and she left the room hurriedly, with blushing face.

"There is one thing he might do," thought I, "and that is, propose to our Peggy without fear of receiving the same 'anser' the milk peddler will in the morning."

Peggy soon returned with her sewing, and we discussed the best manner of disposing of Barkis's offer. I advised her to place her refusal in the "picher," and, as a motive of caution, to sign it "The Girl," and to take extra precautions that he might never see her again, so as to be in danger of a relapse.

At tea time she read her love-letter to *him*, who said he had "been expecting the soap-grease and ash-man would propose soon; she had cast such winning glances to them that he had noticed our soap-grease now supplied us with yellow soap, and the ash-man willingly removed three barrels for a 'quarter.'"

"Then I am not an unprofitable servant in your household."

"Indeed you are not."

She wished *his* advice as regarded the wording of her reply, and said, "I know by the looks of him he is a limpsey soul, yet I do not wish to hurt his feelings more than I can help."

"Let your words be as decided and as few as civility will allow, and the worst consequence that can follow will be a diminishing of the lacteal bounty."

"Yes, that will be best," *he* said, "but I *do* hate to have the milk bill increased. I trust the ash-man will not propose, and strike for a higher price."

With the "picher" next morning was deposited Peggy's refusal of the honor offered her. I made it convenient to busy myself in the dining-room at the milk-man's usual hour, and saw his great red hand swoop down upon the dainty snowflake of a note like a butcher bird upon a tiny sparrow, and he left the house with a look of exultation spread o'er his plain features.

But for many days thereafter he wore a depressed look, and glanced anxiously around whenever he came in, but Peggy was never to be seen, and soon our supply of milk was cut down to the quantity that we paid for, and he had returned to his natural state of an unpretending milk peddler.

One evening not long after, when we three were sitting dreamily over the fire, I said to *him* : "All our previous aid-de-camps have made me a confidant of their old loves, but our present Peggy has been very reticent on

such subjects. Do you suppose she is innocent of any past love dreams?"

"Innocent as a lamb," broke in Peggy; "but for all that I've been dreadfully disappointed by the perfidy of man. The reason I have said nothing, is on the principle that 'still waters run deep.' Love dreams! Oh, I've had 'em. My heart's best affections have been trifled with and widowed several times. Though I wore no 'shrubs' that the vulgar eye might gauge my grief by the expense of my crape, it is none the less true, that my heart has been so often pierced by Cupid's darts, that I doubt not but a post-mortem would reveal it to be in as shabby and deplorable condition as an old felt hat that has served as target for a modern 'rifle team;'" and she sprang up laughingly, to throw a little light on the subject, lest we should grow too sentimental, dreaming in the witching twilight.

CHAPTER VI.

BARKIS SECOND MORE FAVORABLY RECEIVED.

THE days glided swiftly by, and our attachment to Peggy increased with our acquaintance. The doctor frankly owned that I owed my improvement full as much to the healthful mental atmosphere, created by Peggy's wit and cheerfulness, as to his professional skill.

I noticed many symptoms that confirmed our original diagnosis as to the doctor's state of mind. He was almost always now accompanied by one or another of his many small children, and he would invariably find some excuse to send them into Peggy's department. One day it would be for a glass of water, lest they might be thirsty ere another opportunity offered, whereby they might quench their desire for the cooling liquid ; then it would be "Mamie is very fond of plants, please may she go out and see yours, if it will not trouble Peggy too much ? "

His request was always granted, and as we made it a point never to joke Peggy about it, she would innocently exert herself to entertain either of the seven motherless babes that might be sent out ; and the children, after the manner of childhood, finding they were made much of, were never in any haste to return. And the doctor would be forced to seek the kitchen in pursuit of the orphans, where he was liable to find them seated on the floor with Peggy, playing perhaps with the box of colored marbles (that were once our darling Bertie's), or maybe perched in her lap eating cookies and milk, and listening with childish wonder to some tale of fairy-land falling sweetly from the dewy lips of our Peggy.

The children were with difficulty won from their new acquaintance, and the doctor, too, would slowly retire from her presence with an I-don't-wish-to-go expression upon his intellectual features.

It was not long ere the whole troop—Willie, Millie, Frankie, Susie, Tommie, Mamie and Jamie—had each in turn been introduced, and upon their second visit they needed no suggestion to lead them to seek the precincts of the kitchen in search of Peggy, sweet cakes and a draught of “Barkis’s” milk. We told her it was a pity that, now when there were so many wee mouths to be fed, we were obliged to *buy* all our milk, the surplus of her earlier days here would have been of *so* much service. After the children had fairly learned the way here, it was not rarely that two or more would be seen early in the forenoon at the back door seeking entrance. “Oh Peggy, wese tomed here wese so lonesome ; Bridget won’t let us pay nofair, shes so tross, and my dolly’s head boked, and she won’t fix anudder one on for me ; said dit papa to, ’twas his bisness, she didn’t know how ; papa says he tant, he don’t know how to make dollies worth a tent ; won’t you peze, Peddy ?”

So “Peddy” soothed the babies, told Mamie to leave the dolly and she would try, and I bought a pretty head with golden curls, and ere they came the next morning for it “Peddy” had glued it on to the shoulders, had fastened the limbs a little more securely, thoroughly renovated and cleansed the tiny wardrobe, and Mamie’s admiration knew no bounds as she received it. “Oh youse dooder dan Biddy, and youse ever so much smarter dan papa, for he taid he toodn’t nohow ! and—oh, oh, it’s dot a polonade, it’s dot a polonade ! Oh, Peddy,

I'se doing yight home to ask papa to mischarge Biddy yight off and hire you, and you'll mend my yed dess, won't you? Biddy says she won't, papa tan dit a wife to do it, but I don't want no old wife yound; you tome, Peddy, and then papa won't have to let his toes tick outn his tockings when he takes his shoes off. Willie tounted free, five, two toes ticking out last night when papa warmed his feet."

And the wee child, with her repaired dolly hugged closely to her, "yan yight off" to ask the doctor to "mischarge" Biddy and hire "Peddy." The doctor was embarrassed at his next call, and, with heightened color, said he feared his babies had been annoying us, but it should not happen again; he had given the servant strict charge to see that they did not "yun" away again. I assured him the little ones had done no harm; we had not considered it an annoyance, therefore it was none. I begged him to feel easy upon that score, and told him that I pitied the motherless things, left so much to the care of unloving "Bridget." "You ought to have a housekeeper or wife, Doctor, to look more tenderly after your darlings than Biddy will do. Now is the age when they need and miss petting more than any later period in life."

"That is what the children think, and they go to sleep and wake up crying, "Pese mischarge Bridget and dit *Peddy*." And the doctor asked me if I would recommend *her*.

"Oh, yes, but I do not think she would come, though she loves the children ; when she leaves me she will resume her profession."

" You did not think I was in earnest, did you ? I see I must make a confession. I am and have been a long time deeply in love with your "Peggotty," but for two reasons have deferred making any marked advances towards gaining her favor ; first, I am the eldest, and not many young girls would be willing to assume the mothership of my large family ; secondly, I feared Peggy might think that I considered her a servant girl, and was only airing my gallantry to keep me in practice, whilst I reserved my sincerity for those of my own class, and therefore I would patiently await her recovery and resumption of her proper sphere. I should not wish to encounter an indignant flash of suspicion from those bright eyes of hers even for an instant, but I find it not so easy to keep my resolution as one might deem. As Peggy is now, as one might say in your care, I have to beg your permission to pay my most honorable addresses to her here, and win her if I can."

" *He* and I esteem you very highly, and should be much pleased if Peggy should look upon your suit with favor. I do not approve of match-making, and therefore you must trust to urging your own suit. Whenever we are called to part with Peggy it will be with pain, yet we would rather it should be to make your home happy than to wear her young life out in the tedium of the school-

room. As an earnest of true faith with you, I will inform you that Peggy is at leisure this morning, that I heard her say she wished somebody would ask her to go to ride, and your pony and buggy really look very tempting out there in the beautiful sunlight."

The doctor sprang up with a cordial "Thank you ;" and just at that moment in walked unconscious Peggy.

The doctor asked her if she would not "like a drive this beautiful morning, I having to visit a patient two or three miles out of the village," etc.

"Peddy" evinced a slight surprise in her manner, but quietly answered, "Yes, if the mistress can spare me," with a mischievous look at me.

I gave the desired consent, and soon she was equipped in a neat grey suit, the grey felt hat relieved from its sombreness only by a tiny spray of brilliant holly berries — a suit which became her style of beauty very much indeed. As the doctor sprang in beside her, and, with his strong, white, supple hand, gathered up the lines, the pony, unneeding whip or chirrup, arched its pretty neck and dashed spiritedly off, and I thought they were the finest looking couple that had driven through the village for many a day ; and that the doctor could not do better than take his children's advice and "dit Peddy yight off now."

I congratulated "Peddy" on her return upon the "healthful glow" that her ride had given her, and advised her to repeat the medicine as often as she had an

opportunity—advice which thereafter she followed about twice a week during the few remaining weeks of her stay with us. For it was not long ere she returned from a drive looking quite “feverish,” but my most solicitous inquiries as to the state of her health were unheeded, until I professed that my anxiety was so great that I should “send for the doctor at once, for delays are dangerous, and many a life has been lost by neglecting to obtain professional advice sufficiently early.”

I arose from my easy-chair professedly to put my threat in execution, when, in terror lest I should carry the joke so far, she confessed that the doctor had told such a pitiful tale of toeless stockings and cold dinners, that her heart had melted in pity for him, and she had consented to be little wifey to the doctor and mamma to the ragged, neglected seven, on condition that he “mis-charged” stark, non-caring “Bridget” at once, and supplied her place with a more fit personage.

In consequence of her promise, she must give her notice at once and leave us, to make as soon as possible the necessary trousseau. “The doctor said a month’s notice is ample, but I do not see how I can be married so soon, for I wish to have my own wardrobe in perfect order, so that I can pay my whole attention to clothing that regiment of little midgets—and it will take me a *year* to do that thoroughly.”

“Yes, and by the end of that time they will all have

outgrown their suits, and you will have to begin over again," said I tantalizingly.

"Oh dear, how you discourage me ! No you don't either ; I can fix that, I'll move all the suits down to the next younger, and will utilize all the unworn, and leave me only one child a year to dress. Grand idea ! I believe I'll get it patented, and all future stepmothers shall pay me a royalty of so much per head for all step-children whom they clothe after that plan ;" and Peggy danced across the room, laughing at the ease with which she had, as she said, "exposed" of that dilemma.

"Seems to *me* that each time you move the suits down there will be a *wee* one that will have to remain empty, if you remain always—only seven."

"Oh, you torment. I shall give them to the poor *every* time. Put that in your smoke and pipe it," and she left me laughing.

She soon fluttered back and I told her it would *kill* me to have her leave.

"Kill you ? Well you'll have to change a great deal or you'll make a lively corpse."

"You will be married here, and the whole *seven* shall be grouped in a half circle behind you, ready to scream mamma to the tops of their voice at a given signal."

When *he* came home I overwhelmed *him* with the news of the prospective wedding that was soon to grace (grease, *he* thought, if those seven were coming, would be the better word) our parlor.

"Well, 'Peddy,'" said he, that evening as we gathered before the bright wood fire that lightened and lengthened the twilight for us, "Kessy says you have been seeking the light, and have experienced a change of heart, and feel it impressed upon you that it is your duty to devote the remainder of your life to missionary labors—such as comforting the widowers and the motherless. I congratulate you and wish you all happiness in your new sphere, and trust you will never doubt but that your conversion was a true one and be inclined to backslide or perform your multiform duties—Matron of an 'Orphans' Home'—with lukewarmness of heart."

The ensuing weeks were filled with the hurry and bustle incidental to a hasty marriage ; a niece of ours kindly added her name to the list of volunteers (that always "stood in the gap" during the temporary losses of our Peggotties), by offering to stay with us till after the wedding, or until "Peggotty the Fifth" appeared upon the scene. I gave Peggy her whole time to devote to her wedding paraphernalia, and Etta and I gave her what assistance we could.

The wedding day dawned auspiciously ; the bride was charming ; the bridegroom wore a happy, contented look ; the seven were duly and newly equipped and present with various expressions of bright-eyed wonderment upon their faces at the novel scene. But the countenances of the infantile regiment beamed with joy when made to understand that papa was to "tate Peddy home

yight off," and they said, "Papa shall nebber, nebber mischarge Peddy."

Willie innocently asked, "Did papa hire Biddy *that* way?"

CHAPTER VII.

PEGGOTTY FIFTH ASCENDS THE THRONE.

SHORTLY after the wedding Etta was summoned home by sickness in her mother's family, and we were once more alone, but hopeful of soon securing a successor. Again I urged the question of boarding, but he had not yet opened his eyes to the fact that *now* we had all the discomforts of housekeeping and *none* of its comforts. The days passed on, and *he* and I managed the most needful duties as best we might! A friend hearing of our dilemma wrote us that she knew of a middle-aged lady, that had recently been divorced from her partner of many years' joys and sorrows, and she would like to secure a good home. The court had decreed her a certain amount of alimony, but not sufficient to wholly support her, and our friend offered to *recommend* us to her. I wrote that if she could recommend *her* we would be glad to employ the woman, and a few days later a note from the widow (?) herself announced she would be with us Saturday by the noon train. We congratulated

ourselves, for this woman *must* be just the *person*—old enough to be steady minded, with no thoughts of lovers, past or future, and we hailed her coming with joy and hope. Saturday came, and a heavy snow was falling, which somewhat damped our hopes of the promised arrival, and, tired, sick and almost discouraged, I dragged wearily through the morning's work, setting my house in order for the Sabbath.

Soon after the arrival of the train to our station was heralded by the shrill whistle, footsteps on the piazza attracted my attention, and a querulous voice near the dining-room entrance was heard asking, “Are you *sure* this is the place? ’cause I don’t want to *knock* till I’m *sure*.”

A sharp boyish voice replied, “Yes, I *knows* this is where they live.”

Then a nervous rap-rap-rap sounded upon the door.

I opened it and admitted the oldest young woman, or the youngest old woman (I do not know which would be the most correct description) that I ever met with. The small boy deposited on the floor a valise, about the dimension and shape of what the farmers denominate a four-bushel bag, and receiving a few pennies as remuneration for his services, departed after giving me a knowing look that said plainly, “Aint she a queer ‘un?”

Whilst she was divesting herself of her wrappings I observed closely her general appearance. A small withered old face of apparently sixty (though I learned

afterward she professed only to have known forty) summers, in which was deeply set two small, glittering, restless black eyes, a straight nose, nervous mouth that, by her frequent grimaces to make a favorable impression, disclosed the fact of its containing a full set of dentist's ware, a high-tempered chin, and, to go upwards again, a low forehead, nearly hidden from view by a row of fine curls or "idiot-fringe" that fell over it. The head was surmounted by a black velvet hat, crowned with a wealth of large pink roses, a jaunty black lace veil attached, now thrown carelessly to one side; a black velvet cloak of old style but nice texture, hands encased in black kids, her dress of black brilliantee was elaborately made, a black and white plaid shawl was thrown, with an attempt at gracefulness, over one arm, a heavy lace ruche in the throat of her cloak, and an elaborate pink satin necktie, adorned with long heavily-knotted pink fringe, completed her appearance at her entrance.

When her "things" (as she called them) were removed, I saw before me a small, wiry-framed woman, with thin hands that resembled claws, and caused a tremor throughout my frame, as I thought how such hands would *clutch* if they saw fit. The hair was elaborately, and, for a woman of her apparent age, mysteriously arranged, for just as one would think the secret was discovered, and that it *was* undeniably false, another view of this marvel of art (for such I yet believe it *must* have been) would seem to refute the imputation

and assert its naturalness. I conducted her and her trappings to the sacred realm above, and once more went through the honors of installation. As I turned to leave her, that she might assume (as I supposed she would) her working garments, she called me back to say that her trunk was at the depot and she would like me to send for it as soon as possible.

I passed down the stairs, expecting she would soon follow and commence upon her duties ; yet the afternoon wore away and tea time was at hand before she put in an appearance. I inferred that she did not think it worth while to commence her labors so late in the week —a symptom that did not augur well for our mutual satisfaction.

It was with difficulty that I suppressed my amusement at her efforts to assume coquettish graces, and the airs suited to a gushing maiden of sixteen short, *simple* summers, when at the tea table I introduced her to *him*. *He* received it imperturbably, of course, which made it all the more ludicrous to me. She regretted so much that I had not a piano, for she was very fond of music, and had “lotted” upon my playing for her evenings. She simpered and trifled with her toast, and now and then supplemented her performances by an attempt to slyly adjust her teeth, that were possessed of that agreeable quality of occasionally dropping from her mouth. By the time our tea was disposed of, my mind was con-

vinced upon one point—that she either was on the eve of insanity or was recovering from an attack.

I told *him* afterward of my conclusion, and that I should not keep her, for I have from childhood possessed a horror of a person that is ever so slightly deranged—be it from champagne or any other cause, genteel or otherwise.

“Oh, what nonsense ; it is all in your imaginings. You have the most vivid imagination of any woman I ever knew, and when it once gets started it runs away with you. Now please don’t go to fretting yourself, my dear, over any such foolish notions. I did not see anything that betokened insanity. Certainly the display she made of her regret that our sitting-room was minus a piano, *was* rather laughable under the circumstances. Perhaps I will buy you one so that you can drum for her amusement. But, seriously, I see nothing farther about her than that she is queer, and has a ridiculous desire to appear youthful.”

When he alluded to my “vivid imagination” I was silenced, and, after that “bewitching way” of mine, suffered him to think he had convinced me of my error. But not in the least. Though I know when I had best drop a subject and await the development of the future, to justify my opinion, yet I am not easily led to believe that a self-evident fact is otherwise than it appears until it is proved so.

He is continually informing me, when I tell him a cer-

tain event is going to happen, that I "possess a very vivid imagination, and the whole thing is a figment, a chimera, of your own creation, and really you should be more careful about allowing yourself to be so misled."

But when events justify my prophecies he does not yield the point, but simply says, "Fate chanced to prove your words true, that is all." *He* will not acknowledge that the whole thing consists in the fact that I have eyes and use them, ears that hear and understand. I yielded the point and assented that "Peggotty the Fifth" should stay until we could agree that it was best for her to leave; but this decision was not made without some qualms of fear that some day I should feel the clutch of those thin fingers in rather an unpleasant manner.

I waited developments with much anxiety. She gradually assumed charge of her duties, and performed them after a certain fashion of her own, which was to do *nothing* well, yet to fall short of doing it sufficiently ill to warrant a discharge for that and nothing else. *He*, for the first time since our marriage, began to look strangely at the too oft repeated calls for butter, sugar, eggs, lemons, etc. "Do you know," said he to me in awed tones, "that our expenses are double what they were before we had help?"

"Doubtless they are, my dear. Did you not expect it? There are three of us now, and our Peggotties are careless of expense. Without doubt a great deal is

swept up from the cook-room floor. I do not suspect either of the number of any intentional dishonesty."

"Cannot you take charge of the cooking personally, stay out here and direct them, and see that this waste is stopped?" asked *he* anxiously.

"Certainly I can do so; but you would immediately have to search for No. 6. Ordinary servants will not submit to such strict surveillance, and we do not employ such—only those who deem themselves our equals and stand upon their dignity at the slightest attempt at dictation."

"What shall we do then?"

"Had we not better try boarding?" I suggested meekly, as if the thought had just struck me as a favorable idea. "Would it not be preferable to this bother of every now and then dragging along a week or two anyway, whilst you are forced to neglect your office for a number of days seeking help? When we do find a person the work is not satisfactorily performed. I am obliged to treat them as an equal, whether they have an intelligent idea in their heads or not, and you aver that our bills are now double what they were before we had help, and you know how rarely in these days a guest sits at our table. Now, had we better not board?"

"No; most decidedly not. I do not see how we *can* board; but it appears to me as if *you* might contrive *some* way to remedy these evils. Come now, can you not?" said he coaxingly.

I was nearly vexed, but concealed it. "Just like a man," I thought, "always to think that a woman can contrive to get along somehow." If there is a woman that has not been told so a thousand times when her hands and heart were full, and more duties were clamoring for attention than two could do full justice to, I wish she would now speak, and the whole world should listen.

Peggotty still pegged on her daily way more or less irregularly as the fit took her, and I tried to skillfully manage things "somehow," so that *he* might be better satisfied with the net results, and equally careful not to offend thereby any of her many jealous points of character, lest we might again suddenly find ourselves under the necessity of *his* starting forth upon a "Peggotty hunt," and *I* be compelled to weakly wield the broom and duster for a few weeks.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE'S LIKE OLD GUGGINS.

WHETHER jealous people are always insane or not I do not know, but one thing is certain, an insane person is always jealous. I never yet saw one but observation of whom would detect that you were always subjected to a suspicious surveillance from the corner of their eyes, and in making the simplest remark you will suddenly find

yourself confronted with a sparkling, darkling eye, and the stern question, "What do you *mean?*" I have heard that question so many times, with the unmistakable tone of the maniac, that those simple words, used by the sanest person, strike a terror into my innermost sensitiveness that I do not easily recover from. Each week I was becoming more and more nervous, as I became more thoroughly aware that my suspicions were correct, and that "*Peggotty*" *was* deranged, yet nothing I could tell him of her strangeness would convince him. He never saw anything. Indeed she did conceal most of her freaks in his presence, and in the presence of our family physician. The old doctor laughed when I asked him if he observed aught about her that spoke of a deranged mind. "No," said he, jocularly. "I concluded she hadn't *any* mind at all, for I always notice she begins to smirk and flirt around girlishly whenever she sees me coming in."

I saw he was obtuse, and nothing was to be gained from him, so I gathered my courage, and awaited the crisis which I knew must come soon.

Lately she had shown a new tendency, that of watching *him*, and comparing him to "*Old Guggins*," her late lord and master. She would rush into the sitting-room — "he is going over the hill, ma'am, I saw him."

"Well, what of it?" I would ask.

"You take it cool now, but you won't always; that's the way old Guggins used to do. I never knew where

he went to ; *he* makes me think every day of old Guggins."

Perhaps the next night it would be, "Do *you* know where *he* went after tea ? "

"No."

"Well, *I* do. He went down the street—that's the way old Guggins used to do. Oh, I thought he would kill me ! He never would buy me sirloin steak to make mince pies, he wouldn't ; old Guggins was just so tight ; he'd start off down street, and I wouldn't know where he was going, and he'd think I didn't see him, and I'd run to the door and holler after him, 'Thought you was smart, didn't ye, old Guggins ? but I see you, you didn't get off so sly as you expected, did ye, old Guggins ?' And then when he came home he'd be mad 'cause I hollered at him, and the neighbors heard it. I was glad he *was* ashamed to have the neighborhood see just how mean he *would* act. That's the way old Guggins done for years, but I'd keep watch and holler at him, so the neighbors could see what he was up to. *He* makes me think dreadfully of old Guggins. I don't believe you'll always live with him. When they get to going so you can't stand it long."

I thought, "the more I see and hear from you do *I* realize that I cannot 'stand' your presence long." I had been confined to my room much more than usual during the reign of "Peggotty the Fifth," so had not become as well posted upon her household customs, habits

of personal cleanliness, and many idiosyn—crazys, as might have been expected in the same length of time had it been otherwise. One day, for instance, she noticed a new supply of hem-stitched pocket handkerchiefs of mine.

“ What do you do with so many handkerchiefs ? ”

“ So many ? There is not a large supply.”

“ I should think so ; I never use such things ;” and her pallid nose curled with contempt for the weakness of those who did. “ I have but one, and that a peddler gave me.”

“ But one ! What do you use ? ”

“ For every day, I use my apron, and when I'm dressed up, I use my overskirt or polonaise. I like the fashion ever so much, they are so handy for that. Before they came into fashion it was a *real* bother to turn up the facing of your dress in the street, but I always did though, and if any of the greeney's wanted to laugh they might. I don't waste my money for handkerchiefs, nor my sister don't neither, and she is a rich widow, and last Christmas she had a *dozen* handkerchiefs on the tree from a niece, and I thought, and so did she, that it was mean and insulting to give anybody a present of something they didn't need, nor never used. I thought it dreadful queer. I don't see what they meant by it, for they knew she *never* used any. They might have give her something she'd have liked—a music box or something. Now, I've got rid of old Guggins, I'd be con-

tented if I had a music box." She stopped to catch her breath, and I hurried from the room in complete disgust.

How could I ever endure her presence another hour? Horrible thought—her overskirt and polonaise! Shall I ever forget it? It is no wonder that people say "old Guggins was glad to get rid of her," thought I, and that she gained her divorce only because he would not trouble himself to oppose it, as he well might have done had he so chosen.

"Old Guggins!" I congratulate you upon your release!

When I would tell *him* of her insane ramblings, *he* would laugh it off, saying she was simply disagreeable, and *he* did not wonder that Mr. Guggins was willing she should obtain a divorce from him. But when he came home at night, found me sick in bed, no supper awaiting his pleasure, and learned that she had packed her small (?) valise and left on the down train for an unknown destination, and indefinite length of time, he began to think that perhaps she had become a little *strange*. He would not allow now that I was right at first, but rather that matters had chanced to turn into the very channel that my "vivid imagination had fancied they run in at first."

Week after week fled and we heard nothing of "Peggotty," and should never have expected to except that her trunk was there, and she had left her clothing strewn around the room, in the clothes room and bureau, thus

proving that she either was completely wild, or intended to return. We left no stone unturned to supply her place, and had been successful at last, and were expecting "Peggotty" the Sixth the next Monday, when one Wednesday evening after four weeks absence, she walked in unconcernedly and without the slightest apology for her long absence. She *did* mention that she had enjoyed herself, and had been with her sister. As it was late, we thought best not to have a scene with her, but in the morning to discharge her, or rather tell her to pack her trunk and leave the house. But he wished me to be mild about it, for he would not have her leave angry on any account.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONTESTED WILL.

IN the morning when she came down I was busy about breakfast. She began at once to assist me. I told her she need not, as during her absence I had supplied her place, and what was due her at the time she left I would pay her as soon as she had packed her trunk.

"Would you discharge me without notice?"

"I consider that you discharged yourself, when you left me without notice, and remained away a month

without a word of information as to your whereabouts."

"That was a different thing ; I wanted a vacation then."

"And I wish help that I can depend upon. There is no need of words. You must pack your trunk at once and leave to-day. Your money is awaiting *you*."

"I shall not go," said she, stubbornly. "I shall stay until next Monday ; that is when I intended to go, and I shall not go until then. I'll have you to know that I did not intend to stay here only this week. I've got a place to keep house for a widower in Egmont, and was going next Monday, and shall not go before for anybody. I've got a beautiful place, not much to do, most they want is for me to be agreeable to the father—he is so lonesome."

All this was said so excitedly, that I do not think she dreamed at first that she had told me of her plans, and thus proved her inconsistency in blaming me for filling her place in her absence, at the same time that she had been away from us so long, and was seeking a more congenial situation. A vision of her, as she would appear when she felt it her business to play the devoted, caused an involuntary smile to cross my features.

"Laughing at me, are you ?" she shrieked. "I am as good as you are, and if you don't let me stay here until I am ready to leave, I'll set your neighbors all against you. I'll fix things so you won't have a friend. I'll tell them you talk about 'em, that you make fun of

'em. They'll believe me because I've lived here and been treated like the family, and they'll think I know."

"Do your worst," said I, coolly ; "any friend *you* can influence, I am willing to lose ; but the first step for you is to pack your trunk at once."

She went to her room and I saw her not again until dinner time.

"Ah," I thought, "she is not going till night."

After dinner she kindly offered to assist me. I thanked her, but told her nay, that I would not hinder her packing, and she returned to her room. But imagine my astonishment as train time arrived, and I had heard nothing from her. I called to her, and she reminded me that she had told me in the morning that she should not go, and she shouldn't until she got ready.

I had just made up my mind to send for the village police to remove our "Peggotty" when *he* returned, but *he* forbade it ; *he* thought if we did so, she might make her threat good of trying to annoy us ; I thought it best to take the risk of that without any worry, but *he* was for temporizing ; she had not insulted *him*, so of course what she had said to me was a mere trifle in *his* estimation ; and *he* said, let her stay till morning and then try again.

The next morning I told her emphatically she *must* go.

"What ! in this storm ?"

There was a slight drizzle.

“Yes,” I told her, and she passed up to her room, as I innocently supposed to pack, but instead of that, an hour or two afterward she came down with some articles of clothing she had washed in the bowl upon the commode in her room, and now hung them by the fire to dry.

What now do you think of my wisdom in giving help—not servants, oh, no! a superior class (?)—a tasteful apartment? How it must look now, for one always needed to understand sculling to enter with safety a room where she was washing; and worse, if possible, *here* were those clothes half washed, filling the rooms with their filthy steam!

What should I, what could I, do? Here was a fine ending to *his* temporizing policy. I could have given way to my feelings easily, but I would control myself as long as possible, and what made it so hard to bear was, that *he* being a man, *would* not see what there was about the whole affair to *vex* me so sorely. Why is it? If he wished to discharge a clerk in the office, and said clerk should persist in occupying the office till such time as he pleased to depart, would he not see the point? I think so, and realize that it was a sharp point too.

For a few moments I was stunned at the coolness of her impudence, but recovered myself in time to intercept her upon her return to the staircase, and say firmly and sternly, “‘Peggotty,’ is your trunk packed?”

“No, ma’am. I told you I should not go until Monday, and I shan’t.”

I went at once to her room and found she had told the truth. She had not disturbed an article in her bureau. In short, her room no more betokened that its occupant had the slightest intention of taking her departure than my own did. Again I asked myself, what should I do? *He* would not return for hours. I had foolishly promised him that I would not call the police, and in consequence of that error I was defied by a shrewd maniac. If I could have photographed the expression of malicious cunning that crossed her face! when I again ordered her to pack that trunk at once, as she said, "How can I? You know some of my clothes are just washed, and I cannot pack *wet* things."

That explained why she had wet her clothes, that she might have an excuse to stay. I told her to pack her dry things, and when *he* returned we would attend to her case.

He came, and when informed of the status matters were assuming, he thought it time for some decisive action. "Go to her and say that I will have an express-man here at half past four to take her trunk to the depot."

I did so gladly. There she sat in her room rocking away as if for a wager, drumming her heels upon the carpet, her nose-glasses (as she styled them) perched pertly upon her charming nasal organ, apparently deeply interested in reading a chapter from the Scriptures.

Her room still bore the settled-for-life look it wore upon my other visits to it. I gave her the message.

With a shriek of rage she sprang from her contented posture. "I tell you I *will* not go ! I tell you I *can't* go—my things are wet ! Don't you hear ? You are a cruel-hearted woman. Turn me out of doors ? I *will* not go !" Each exclamation was a sharp scream that pierced my brain like a knife. She sank back into the rocking chair with an air of sullen determination not to move again.

I left her without another word, intending to go down to the office for help, but ere I had donned my wrappings, she had with maniacal shrewdness divined what my next move would doubtless be, and hastened to anticipate me, and I heard her fleeting (for once) step on the stairs. She sped through the dining-room out of doors.

I removed all appearance of my intention to go out, and returned to the parlor to await the rising of the curtain upon the next act. It soon arose. She burst into the house with a look of triumph. "*He* says he's perfectly willing I should stay," and with a mocking laugh went up to her room.

Soon as the door closed upon her. Without waiting to analyze the probable truth of her report, my severely taxed nervous system succumbed to this last straw, and I indulged in a genuine fit of hysterics. I fought the battle out alone, and when I had reached the exhausted

state of calmness that always follows, he chanced to come in.

"What is the matter?"

"Matter enough I should think, after all that has passed; all the impudence and defiance that I have borne from her, for you to yield the point and give her permission to stay! How could you do it?"

"I did not do so. She has taken that way to gain time." With a look at the clock, "It is impossible for her to go to-night as the train is nearly due. She has outwitted us. But she shall go in the morning, packed or unpacked," and with rapid steps he strode up the stairway to her room, and told her she could have one night's shelter, as there was no later train, but in the morning he and the expressman would be there in season to finish any packing that might be left undone.

How she did rage. "She couldn't go! she wouldn't go!"

Then she could be helped out, he told her, and came down to see if he could quiet his invalid. My nerves were too much shaken by the glimpses of Bedlam I had seen to be calmed very easily. He was forced to take his tea alone, knowing that he had a full-fledged maniac up stairs, and as I told him, one in the earlier stages of it in our room.

He went out after tea "like old Guggins," and I hearing her in the dining-room, arose and passed out into the rooms carelessly as if I had some errand there. She was

not visible until I reached the cook room. At first I saw no one even there, and then I could not repress a sudden start. She was standing upon the cooking stove, one foot upon either of the front covers, with arms folded calmly upon her bosom. She glared and leered down upon me, saying that she wished to *warm her feet*. She looked as though she might spring from her perch and clutch me with those terror-inspiring claws of hers ; I did not care to give her a chance, and therefore left the room as quickly as possible, internally breathing the wish that she might get her feet *well* warmed.

That night I passed with eye and ear on the alert, until the gray dawn of morning gave me courage to hope that the danger was over, and I sank with relief into a morning sleep.

When "Peggotty" made her morning appearance she was dressed identically as upon her arrival, so we felt free to presume that she deemed that her most striking costume, yet in truth she was always dressed strikingly(?). She came down with her valise grasped in both hands, with an air worthy of the most notable carpet-bagger of them all. Her trunk was soon en route for the station, as it ought to have been long before.

True to her first promise, she wended her way, accompanied by her emblematical baggage, to the nearest neighbor, and made a short, and as I heard afterward, exciting call, telling anything and everything, false or true, that she could manufacture or remember ; so by

that means she could possibly indirectly gain their sympathy, and a boarding place until the following week—“for I have told them I would not go till next week, and I don’t mean to.”

I could see her as she rapidly passed from house to house, up and down the street, on her unsuccessful tour in pursuit of a boarding house; at each place I heard she told the same tale of woe, oppression, and grief. That *he* and I led a terrible life, or rather that “he is dreadful good to her, but she uses *him* shamefully,” etc. She forgot to tell them that he resembled “old Guggins.” She gained the favor at one place to unpack her “handbag” for a few days, and soon a line adorned the yard, and her half dozen pieces (she had wet so that they could not be packed) were flaunting exultantly to the breeze. Occasionally she would come out and daintily claw them a trifle, to see if they were drying well, then glance triumphantly at our unhappy domicile (perhaps to see if there was crape on the door in her remembrance).

CHAPTER X.

PEGGOTTY SIXTH ON DECK.

As may well be imagined, the foregoing experiences did not tend to improve my shattered health, and I was now sick indeed, as well as most thoroughly discouraged ; the expected help disappointed us, and though I knew not what to do, yet I fear I did not mourn as I ought, for it seemed to me that another “Peggotty” like the last would be “one drop too much” in my cup, and I feared the test.

For quite a space of time after the departure of “Peggotty” the Fifth the throne was vacant, and our family affairs were kept in order by a corps of volunteers of friends and relatives ; the respite was welcome to me, however severe a tax it may have been felt by them, and I will confess that I hailed with dread the advent of “Peggotty” the Sixth.

The doctor called one day. “What makes you look so blue this beautiful sunny morning ?” was his first salutation.

“Oh, dear ! I am so tired of trying to keep house ; cousin Nannie thinks she cannot stay any longer, and *he* is out on a Peggotty hunt again ; he had heard of one that he thinks will come, and I have prayed all day that

the Lord will not let her come, that some engagement may prevent his being successful."

The doctor laughed heartily. "What a prayer! But why do you not board? it would be much better for you, with your health, to be relieved from this constant care and worry; the irritation of these frequent changes, to say nothing of the fret during their stay, is a sad drawback upon your recovery."

"I would like to board, but can never convince *him* the thing is practicable, and suppose we shall have to live in some manner that resembles house-keeping, until he opens his eyes to the facts of a few more of the ills of *this* manner of living."

The next day when the doctor came, he inquired what success *he* met with upon his "hunting excursion," and whether my prayer was answered. I had the pleasure of informing him that "the Lord heard my prayer, and that *he* in consequence thereof had to seek his game in a new and strange field in a far country, from the fastnesses of which would emerge the next week 'Peggotty, the Sixth.'"

Yet I freely confessed to Nannie that I had hoped *he* would be unsuccessful, and we should be forced to board. Sickness and care were fast ageing and unnerving me, and there was not one throb of pleasure, that I soon should have a new "quean" as the Scotch so aptly call them.

When the door-bell announced her arrival, there was

a choking in my throat, and I begged that I might be excused from seeing her that day at least.

Nannie did the honors, and I was not presented until somewhat later.

I certainly did not fall in love with her, nor do I think any one else ever did—before nor since. Her countenance wore an extremely mysterious, unreadable expression; in fact, it might be produced by a state of chronic self-mystification, that was reflected in her face. With it all was a look that promised to become surly upon slight provocation. The expression of the whole was decidedly repellent; a large round head set like “Wouter Van Twiller” upon her shoulders, without the support of any neck “to speak of;” a large waist, not shapeless, for everything possesses shape of some kind, but it was decidedly unlike any other form I ever met with (perhaps it was Venus-like); long, large limbs, that when she sat down, she had a peculiar knack of arranging her drapery over them so extremely graceful, that it set off and displayed their faultless symmetry with the precision usually granted only to the male sex. This, I found upon acquaintance, was no grace (?) adopted for the drawing-room only, it was the perfection of habit. She met me with an air, not only impressing me with the fact that she was asserting her equality, but that she wished me to understand that it was a *favor* conferred upon me, that she did not “go out” everywhere. I was learning not to be surprised at anything. She was

ever watching lest your words might contain some concealed meaning.

The caution I was obliged to observe lest I might offend some unknown sensitive point, and thus precipitate a disastrous explosion, produced a habit of precision and care, that rendered me a fit person to guard a powder house or nitro-glycerine magazine.

Her ignorance in many things led her to suspect insult where none was intended, as for instance : One day, after dining at a certain place, in telling me of her pleasures, she said, "But there was one thing I did not understand—Mr. Marvin, when he served the turkey, asked each of us what *part* we would have? What did he mean? Did he do it to insult us? That's what I wish to know. Do you think it very polite for him to make talk over the victuals at the table? I thought folks went to the table to eat what was set before them—that's the way I was brought up." This woman felt it a condescension to "work out" anywhere, and would not unless she could be admitted to the table, the sitting-room and parlor as an equal!

Never shall I forget the look with which she confronted me once for saying "Yes'm," a childish habit I have never quite recovered from. The manner with which I was commanded *never* to insult her that way again was inimitable. She informed me that she was not "brought up" to be spoken to in that way, and she would "not submit to it." I did not know but the

masculine being in her righteous anger would personally chastise me.

It was wonderful that a sensible woman would humble herself to submit to such indignities ? But I was helpless, and at their mercy ; if we "kept house," we must have a woman of superior (?) judgment to help us—one that could be treated and trusted *just* "like one of the family," for how could I, confined to my room, be expected to put up with the ordinary class of help ? They are so unreliable, and so liable to be saucy and impertinent, that *he* would not feel safe to leave me in their care ! And we must have help that would be different !

"Peggotty" the Sixth was just at that most interesting crisis of life where one stands upon the threshold of confirmed old-maidism, and turns to give one lingering glance to rosy years of girlhood, left forever behind them, like golden beads counted off from a chain, and thoughtlessly allowed to drop into a swiftly flowing river, that would ever course onward and bear them yearly farther and farther from mortal vision. The fact that her girlhood had passed unappreciated, doubtless had much to do with her strange moods, for it *is* hard for us to believe that the reason we are not appreciated, as we term it, is simply because there is nothing to appreciate.

'Pure gold rarely goes begging.'

Her duties, for a short while, were performed reasonably well, but with the oddest manner accompanying their discharge that even I had ever met with. Usual-

ly her appearance was the perfection of taciturnity itself, yet occasionally she had spasmodic attacks of volubility, that were at times less agreeable than her most taciturn manner. With every month's acquaintance her symptoms of extreme sensitiveness were more frequently made manifest. After an attack of insane raving, superinduced by resentment at some fancied slight, or it might be wilful misunderstanding, she would, when subdued and possibly ashamed of herself, make a sort of half-way apology, by saying that she had "not felt well," or that "I have my poor days same as everybody, and I am naturally sensitive, though my disposition used to be good as anybody's before I had so much to try it."

What she alluded to was a mystery, but I frequently prayed mentally that, for the comfort of those she came in contact with, she might some day become more sensible, and less sensitive.

An unexpected guest to dinner was the signal for a fit of the sulks, that it would take days to eradicate, and my heart learned to beat with fear whenever a friend chanced to drop in near the dinner hour, and it was such a relief, if they pleaded a previous engagement, or had already dined. The fact that I was busy at all times, when my health would allow me, with my books and writing, seemed to be taken by her as a personal grievance, and was the signal for her to don the "war-paint," and give the "whoop" that presaged general activity of the belligerent elements of her illy-balanced disposition.

CHAPTER XI.

PEGGOTTY GETS FUNNY.

PAINFUL as was my situation at times, yet at others there were many things that amused me. During a carnival of sleighing I found much enjoyment in observing the different turnouts, and the merry faces of the happy pleasure seekers ; and often I spoke to *him* at night of the gay street scenes of the day, and its cheeriness. But upon "Peggotty" the effect was just the opposite. One would suppose that each merry party, in gaining their own happiness, had robbed her of what should have been her portion. The merrier and gayer the pageant upon the streets, the more sorrowful became her countenance ; the ladies that tripped along the sidewalk sunny days, in their jaunty street costumes—they too were enemies of hers, and caused her many unhappy hours. She appeared to think that they looked so care free and contented, it must be that they were *rich*, and had *nothing* to do ; a combination that formed her chief idea of happiness. In vain I sought to convince her that this one appearance on the street might be a hard-earned and much prized half-holiday of some hard working wife or mother, from which she must extract joy and strength of spirit sufficient to last her a week, ere she

could escape again from her cares. But it is useless to make an effort to soothe one that desires above all things to be unhappy.

She had also the least capability for appreciating a joke of any person that ever I met with, yet the proof of all rules is the exception. One day she rushed into my room with her face wreathed in smiles ; amusement rippled from her eyes, and lurked around each hard feature. It was plain that her perceptive faculties, as the phrenologists would say, had been roused by something ludicrous, and really touched at last. “Did you see it go up ?”

“I have noticed nothing particular go up.”

“Oh, it was the most comical looking sleigh full of people ; it looked just like a large cage on runners ; it had bars like a cage up the sides, the top was covered with a cloth, and it said on the side ‘Solomon’s Cage for the Eagle Bird.’”

I had not seen it, but any one in Rhode Island, and many Philadelphians, perhaps, have seen the *cage* on wheels, and will see the point. It was neither more nor less than the moving wagon “Eagle Bird” of the veteran driver “Sol. Gage,” placed for convenience upon runners.

It was a joke not soon forgotten by us, but it would have cost us a disastrous battle to have kindly told her that she had not read rightly. She would at once have informed me with a shriek of rage, and unequalled

rapidity of utterance that, “you needn’t insinuate I can’t read. I may not be as accomplished as you are, but I ain’t no fool! I ain’t a nigger! I ain’t a paddy, nor a dog! nor I shan’t work where I am treated like one, and if you want a dog or a servant, you can get somebody else as quick as you are a mind to. I never was a servant, nor I won’t be. If I ain’t as good as you I’ll leave.” As I could not afford to lose an honest “Peggotty” I was forced to allow her the chance of making herself ridiculous elsewhere, rather than to in a friendly manner rectify her blunder.

Another time, in speaking of a lady we had both heard sing, and I was praising her voice, “Peggotty” said she had the best “solo” voice she ever heard. “I always shall think that I might have made a good solo singer if I’d been learnt.” At yet another time, “I know I might have *wrote* if I’d tried; I *made* a real good piece once.”

After one of her “tantrums” she frankly said to me, “You may pay all attention to your literary labors *now*, and I will try after this to bring *my* mind *down* to my work, and be contented.”

I thanked her sincerely, but not without some inner communings upon my utter inability to free myself from such annoyances so long as we placed our hopes upon a “Peggotty.”

Not long after the foregoing permission, so graciously granted me, “Peggotty’s” mind was again under a cloud.

She seemed to be suffering from a mental or physical equinoctial, for which there was no accounting by aught *he* or I had said or even thought.

CHAPTER XII.

PEGGOTTY SIXTH GROWS SENTIMENTAL.

ONE morning she was stricken with a voluble mood, and coming to my room, threw herself into one corner of the lounge, and began to unbosom her former woes, and explain to me what had caused her spirits to flow through such stagnant pools of anger and moroseness.

“I thought I would tell you what it is that keeps me a thinking, and a thinking, till I don’t know what to make of it; I can’t think what it means.” With a quick nervous utterance, that almost defied my following her, broken in upon by attacks of giggling and simpering, and showery interludes, she related her experience to me. I learned from her rambling that she either had, or imagined she had, had in her younger days an exceedingly slight hope of “having a beau;” that she was much joked about it, as doubtless would be the case with her peculiarities; that it did not amount to anything, and the consequent disappointment and worriment of mind in deciding “what they meant” by the many jokes cracked at her expense had effected her mind sadly. To

use her own words, "it almost killed me ; I came near dying." (Here she drooped her head and simpered.) "My nervous system, the doctor said, was all broke to pieces, I'd worked so hard and worried so. What plagued me was, I didn't know what they meant by it (sobs and tears). Did they mean to insult me ? I ain't a fool. Did they think I was ? Maybe I am, but I didn't know it. What did they mean ? that's what I wanted to know then, and I wish I knew now."

Her story amounted to nothing more than this, yet it was two hours before she subsided, and her thoughts returned to sublunary trifles, such as her unwashed breakfast dishes.

I was considerably excited from the double effect of repression of mirth, and the discovery I had just made, that again was I in the power of a deranged person. This then was the secret of her eccentricities, her pouts, her tears, her ravings, that I had thought ill-temper ; the jealous watchfulness for some intended imposition was but the effect of a deranged mind, that for some unknown reason had for a short period been more calm than usual ; but now some equally unknown agency had roused it into full vigor.

After her burst of confidence she went to her work singing a melancholy "solo" of her own composition, adjusting first a bit of "Shall we gather at the ree-e-ver where bright angel feet have trod ?" to her notes, then continuing the same air with the words, "We're almost

there to-day, and may be there to-morrow," etc., until I almost hoped she *would* be.

When *he* came home I told *him* of the distressing discovery. Of course *he* did not "believe it." "I know she is odd as 'Dick's hat band,' but do not alarm yourself about her being crazy; she does not know enough."

In vain I quoted Dr. Ray's opinion upon the subject, that a person born of sound mind would never become insane. It was useless, I could not convince him; *he* was positive that she had not sufficient mental capital to become insane. For the next month I had cause daily to note symptoms of mental disturbance; her disposition showed as many different phases as though it had been a barometer, and indicated the changes of our New England climate. She had hours more pleasant and social than I had ever known of her before, which changed in the twinkling of an eye to ugliness and muttered threats of leaving. "I am tired of being waiter for the lady; you may get another to answer your bell or wait on yourself," which fits of murmuring would change as suddenly to tears or sadness, and all the intermittent stages and phases imaginable.

Vainly I urged that she must leave; it was becoming unendurable; that I had rather be alone and live upon crackers.

The *crackers* convinced *him* that I was growing desperate, but not that she was otherwise than odd. I was learning to sympathize with the old man that said

"Satan owed me a grudge, and paid it with son-in-laws," except that in my case for "son-in-laws" I substituted "Peggotties."

He began to think that there was cause for her to leave, as it was so completely unnerving me, if for nothing else, and *he* had to own that she was growing more queer than ever, yet she cunningly avoided any outbursts in his sight or hearing, but was apparently under great restraint during his presence, and would retreat to a rocking chair in a corner, where, two-thirds hidden by the flower stand, she would remain, unless her work called her elsewhere, and then she would retreat again to her corner with bowed head, and become perfectly silent.

He was surprised that I should tell him, that in his absence she was singing discordant jargon, of various popular hymns, from morning till night; that she neglected her work. "Why not discharge her the next time she is saucy?"

"I dare not. When I am alone with her she will be so violent."

"You are mistaken; she will go quietly enough. It is not as if she were an ordinary servant, and Irish too; she is an American, which makes all the difference in the world."

I said nothing, but thought my past experience did not prove that statement true. Finally he promised to take the duty upon himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEGGOTTY GETS ON HER HIGH HORSE, AND KESIAH
REBELS.

THE opportunity soon arrived. He came home to tea. A glance as we took our places at the table showed that "Peggotty" had left her place vacant. A look around the room revealed her, as lately had been her manner, crouched in the corner, half hidden from view. "Aren't you going to take supper to-night?" asked he, pleasantly.

"I've eat," answered she, snappishly. It was false, unless she had taken a "nummit" very slyly.

In the evening I told him of her behavior during the day.

"Well, we will wait till to-morrow and see."

And we did see! As we came out to breakfast, I bade her good morning. She replied in a sulky manner, and he and I assumed our places at the table. "Peggotty" placed her left hand on the back of her chair, waved her other tragically toward a table at the right, her face flamed and streaked itself with chalky lines, her voice struggled and choked with the effort to speak, lightning flashed from her usually stupid eyes, and with difficulty

she said, "I might take my breakfast to the side table, and not eat with you, if you would like to have me."

The remark was pointless except that her manner was unmistakably that of a deranged person, which was what I had been hoping would chance when *he* was present, that he might have actual knowledge of the fact.

Feeling more courageous in his presence, I questioned her at once to know what the cause of her conduct was; if she had any reason for dissatisfaction to simply say so.

"And go!" shrieked she. Then after a moment's sudden silence in a low calm voice, "but I won't quarrel with you Sunday morning."

"Certainly not, nor any other morning. *I* never quarrel."

"Neither does 'Peggotty,' and if anybody says I am quarrelsome they *lie-e-e!*" was shrieked sufficiently penetrating to reach the "returning board" in Louisiana.

Later in the day, *he* took it upon himself, and informed her it was best for all that our paths should separate a while, and she was at liberty to seek a more congenial situation; he would give her a week's notice, with the understanding that she was to do her work pleasantly for the ensuing time.

There was no reply from her for sometime, then a shriek, "What am I discharged for? In what way have I shown that I was dissatisfied? Answer me!"

He stated two or three of the most pointed offences.

"That is not enough."

"Yes, it is," he said; "I do not intend to hold an argument upon the subject."

"It is not enough for being turned out of doors. I wont go—I never was turned out—I won't be!" Then she murmured in a low sad tone, "But there must be a first time to all things." Then her voice grew excited again, "I came here in good faith—I done your work well—I have not ransacked your things—I have been saving—I am honest—I have heard things about you and said nothing—I've been asked things, but 'Peggotty' was silent—I liked you—but you haven't treated me well to turn me out of doors—but I'll go! I'll go," and became suddenly silent.

"When will you go?" asked he.

"In the morning; that is," in a malicious tone, "if you have kept run of the time and can pay me." He called to me to write a receipt for her to sign, counted out her "shillings," and her accounts with us were squared for all time. But she surprised us too, by having her bill all carried out to date, thus showing that in spite of her professed anger at receiving her discharge, she was in reality only forestalled in her plan to leave us.

The morning came after another sleepless night lest some accident might occur. The morning found her quiet, but with glittering, restless eyes. Never since her arrival had she appeared so much like a rational being, or conversed with such a natural sociality. Whether she

hoped the change would strike us favorably, and we should decide to hire her over again, or not, we did not learn.

It was with pleasure we saw her take her departure.[‡] She gave him a parting shot, saying she wished him “In your sober moments, if you ever have any, think of me.”

And so endeth the reign of “Peggotty” the *sixth*, and I declared myself free and independent of the whole race of “Peggotties” now and henceforth.

“So mote it be,” said *he* in response. “We will go to some quiet hotel and board. You shall never be left alone in a house again with another ‘Peggotty.’”

May he never backslide from his conversion.

A F F I X.

After a careful revision of the foregoing, I feel that it would be unjust, not to acknowledge the one fault, that renders the whole untrue, or rather a gross misrepresentation—*i. e.*, the half has not been told, nor that half as highly tinted as the truth demands, and “a half truth is no truth.” We have now unused capital on hand sufficient for half a dozen volumes of the same stamp.

We have presented a picture that the middle classes in New England who employ “help” (not servants) will fully appreciate, and will ask their neighbors, “how ‘Kesiah Shelton’ knew anything about our family affairs, is a mystery to us—did you tell her, Mrs. Smith? I do wonder how she knew; I’m sure I do not know *her*.” Critics that are unacquainted with the peculiar mode

of living and the status of help in such families, in the six North-eastern States of the U. S. A., will unhesitatingly pronounce the whole a caricature, and a fabrication of the boldest nature.

To the mercy of friend and foe we consign this sketch of New England "help" and their helpless mistresses.

Truly thine,

KESIAH SHELTON.

On this 31st July, 1874, did then personally appear before me, Kesiah Shelton, who did then upon her solemn oath declare, that the foregoing was true, to the best of her knowledge and belief.

SIMON SUPERFINE, Esq.,

Notary Public.

I beg the public to believe that I am not in the habit of swearing; this is the first time, and I would never have done it but for fear of the law.

K. S.

THE END.

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